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# MOMENT BY MOMENT: CONTEXTS AND CROSSINGS IN THE STUDY OF LITERACY IN SOCIAL PRACTICE

*Thesis submitted in fulfilment of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by:*

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# ABSTRACT

The concept of literacy practices has occupied a central place in the New Literacy Studies. It is seen as enabling the conceptualisation of literacy beyond the single instance 'event', and therefore the making of claims about literacy, power and social structure. In this thesis I draw on multi-site ethnography to trace movement beyond the single instance in an exploration of the role of literacy in carrying meanings across contexts. The data was drawn from a 'participatory development' project in South Africa, where homeless people were building houses, interacting with NGOs, architects, engineers and suppliers. A language of description was derived, in which contexts (at micro and macro levels) were conceptualised as activity systems and sequences of activities identified as meaning making trajectories.

Recontextualisations of meanings within trajectories were analysed as strips and the identification of nodes within these strips demonstrated that a focus on crossings across instances illuminates the study of communication and power (with writing seen as one amongst many modes of communication). The work extends theoretical and methodological categories in the New Literacy Studies and locates concepts of multimodality firmly within social practice. The idea is explored that entextualisation processes and text artifacts can be reified or naturalised in an ongoing interplay between sociality and materiality. The claim that recontextualisation leads to more durable forms of meaning making and to stability and permanence within human environments is scrutinised, and an argument developed that within economies of signs and meanings characterised by inequality, disrupted lives and pre-bureaucratic practices such claims need to be treated with caution. It shows, however, that in the tracery of chaining of meanings, reification tends to occur in chaotic processes where there is no standardisation, while naturalisation occurs in more predictable text-regulated processes. The study therefore has implications for theories of bureaucracy and complexity.

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# NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF MAIN FIGURES

*Note: I use the racial terms "black" and "white" here to describe people involved with this research. I do not use these terms in the actual thesis. I mention them here because, in South Africa, unfortunately and to a lesser and lesser extent, skin colour continues to index social positioning and capital, as well as cultural values. There are a few points in the thesis when these distinctions become salient.*

Name/nickname/abbreviation or acronym	Description
<b>Researchers</b>	
Catherine Kell, CK, Cathy, (real name)	Writer of this thesis, doctoral candidate, researcher and practitioner in field of NLS, "white", English speaker
Nonthutuzelo Conjwa, NC, Nonthutu, Thutu, (real name)	University student and fieldworker for funded project for eight months, "black", Xhosa speaker
Somikazi Deyi, SD, Somi, (real name)	University-based fieldworker for funded project for two months, "black", Xhosa speaker
Monde Matshoba, Monde, (not real name)	Khayaalethu resident and fieldworker for funded project for four months, "black", Xhosa speaker
Nolwanda Ntombeni, Nolwanda, (not real name)	Khayaalethu resident and fieldworker for funded project for four months, "black", Xhosa speaker
<u>Khayaalethu members (names changed to prevent identification)</u>	
Nomathamsanqa, Noma, (not real name)	Khayaalethu resident and research subject, subject of Trajectory One "Writing a wrong" (Chapter Four). Allocated a ready built house (built as a demonstration house) as a result of her disability, in second group of "forty"
The Management Committee, MC	Elected by Khayaalethu General membership, ousted Phase Two
"The three amigos"	Khayaalethu Management Committee members including MamaToleni, MamaKhanyisa and Mantu
MamaToleni	Chairperson of the MC
MamaKhanyisa	Treasurer and Secretary of the MC
The General	Around 200 largely female members of Khayaalethu, living in shanties in and around Khayaalethu, classified the "poorest of the poor", able to access Government subsidy for first time home-owners
MamaSolani	Khayaalethu resident and research subject, subject of Trajectory Two "Purchasing building materials" (Chapter Five). Not in first "twenty" group or second "forty" group but in following "thirty-one" group, in Phase Three
Nomhle	Khayaalethu resident, one of the first to be allocated a site in first "twenty" and build a house. Member of Management Committee, but slowly withdrew from the MC over Phase One. Record-keeper in Phase One
Busi and Nomi	Khayaalethu residents, hoping to be amongst the second "forty" group to be allocated sites to build.
Veliswa	Khayaalethu resident, building house in first "twenty" group
<u>Support staff (names changed to prevent identification)</u>	
Uta	Architect, assistant to Hans, "white".
Hans	Architect, "white", German-speaking.
Max	Director of the Service Organisation, University-educated, "white" South African.
Margaret	Fieldworker for the Service Organisation, "white", English speaking, from the UK.
Deborah	Engineer from large Cape Town based engineering firm, "white", English speaking South African.

## ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CCC	Cape Town City Council/Councillors
ERS	Expenditure Recod Sheet
FSO	Financial Service Organisation (not real name)
HASSOC	Housing Association (not real name)
KH1	Khayaletu One (Savings Club, in Khayaletu)
KH2	Khayaletu Two (Savings Club in Khayaletu)
NLS	New Literacy Studies
PHP	People's Housing Process
SO	Service Organisation (not real name)
SoUL	Social Uses of Literacy

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- The research site and fieldworkers

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- My academic supervisors

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## Chapter One. Introduction: The journey to the questions

*Suppose we stop looking at individual objects. See them instead as participating in a long stream of events that unfold through time; chart their flow; then consider persons only as the points where flows of objects originate, congregate and from which they disperse. This long view takes ... producers, distributors, and recipient-users into account at once. (Douglas, 1994:17; quoted in Iedema, 2001)*

*It has now become something of a truism that we are functioning in a world fundamentally characterised by objects in motion. The objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. This is a world of flows (Appadurai, 1996). It is also of course a world of structures, organisations and other stable social forms. But the apparent stabilities that we see, under close examination, are usually our devices for handling objects characterised by motion.... The various flows we see are not co-eval, convergent, isomorphic or spatially consistent. They are...in relations of disjuncture. By this I mean that the paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things have different speeds, axes, points of origination and termination and varied relations to institutional structures in different regions, nations or societies. Further, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations. Indeed it is the disjunctures between the various vectors characterising this world-in-motion that produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice and governance. (Appadurai, 2000:5)*

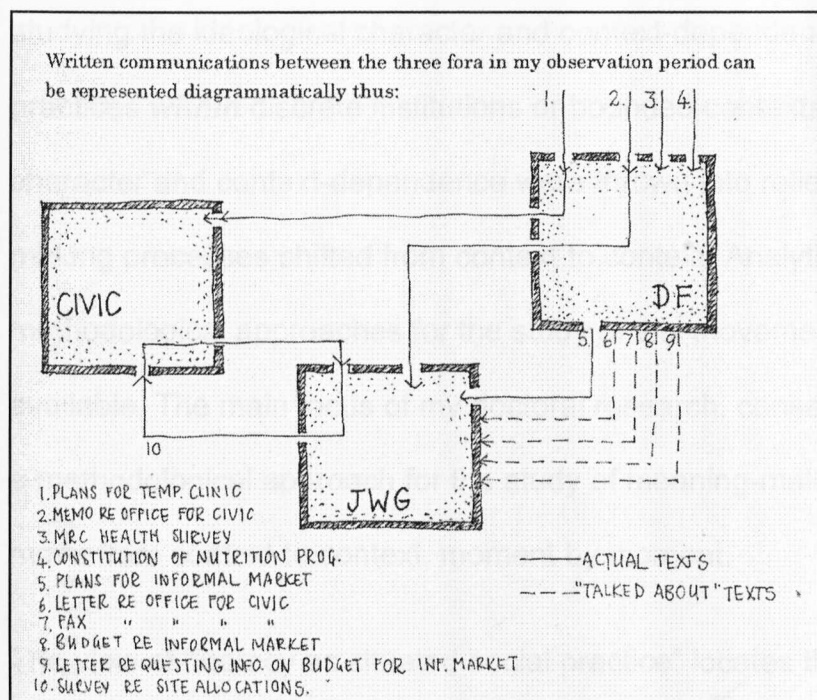
### Introduction

Appadurai's words go to the heart of a central problematic of our times: the relation between the local and the global. Modes and media of communication carry meanings in the streams and flows that make up the texture of the contemporary world. In more recent history, literacy has been one of the most important channels by which meanings have traversed space and time. But the contribution of scholars working in sociolinguistics, anthropology and history over the past three decades has been to show the flaws in conceptualising literacy as autonomous of those meanings and the forms they take, as simply a carrier. Ethnography has provided us with both epistemological and methodological approaches for understanding the problems with autonomous models of literacy (Street, 1982; 1993), and the studies thus produced have all contributed to the

emergence of the “New Literacy Studies” (Gee, 1992; Street, 1993, 1995, 2001; Baynham, 1995; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000). But ethnography may also have constrained our ability to focus on the movement of meanings across contexts, through its long tradition of studying bounded communities, groups and sites, where the emphasis has lain on “production within”, rather than “projection across” (Rampton, 2000).

One of the origins of the research in this thesis lay in a diagram, drawn rather intuitively, as part of the research for my Master’s degree on literacy practices in an informal settlement in Cape Town, South Africa (Kell, 1994; 1996c) and titled “Directionality of texts in development institutions”. The three development institutions being considered were the Civic Association, the Joint Working Group (JWG) and the Development Forum (DF). The Civic Association was the local democratically elected oppositional organisation in the informal settlement; the JWG was a negotiating group which brought together local government officials (this was still the apartheid government in 1993) with Civic Association members and other interested parties; and the Development Forum consisted of members of the community and members of non-governmental organisations which had supported the establishment of Site 5 and were interested in its development. Here is the diagram, as I drew it back in 1994:





*Figure 1.1: Directionality of texts in development institutions*

As can be seen, each of these institutions was drawn as a box with walls that were permeable to material texts (which originated in other contexts) and texts that were not present in a material sense but were referred to and discussed in and across a series of meetings. The boxes represented the three different institutions and the buildings which housed them in the informal settlement. In focusing on a selection of literacy events and practices for my Masters' thesis, I traced a set of interactions around specified issues flowing over time through the three institutions, in what was called "slices through the life history of agenda items", examining institutional discourses, individual voices and literacy practices in each case. This tracing was complemented by the diagram, which helped in visualising the flow of texts, and the play of power which was at times mediated through the uses and valuing of the texts.

Only later did I realise that the diagram I had drawn intuitively in 1994 lay at the heart of what I really wanted to research and what appeared as a possible theoretical and methodological gap in the field in which I was working, the New Literacy Studies or NLS. What I had tried to demonstrate was the inadequacy of

studying the ideological character and context-dependence of literacy events and practices *within* discrete institutions or bounded contexts. In fact, ideological character and context-dependence were thrown into relief as and when meaning-making processes shifted from context to context. Analytical concepts and methodological approaches for the study of this movement in itself were not available. The main focus of my doctoral research, consequently, is the search for a methodological approach for the study of meaning-making processes as they move from context to context, moment by moment.

The view of “literacy as situated social practice” locates the research within a field that has studied literacy using anthropological and sociolinguistic theories and methods. Much of this work has shown that literacy cannot be seen as a set of decontextualised cognitive skills existing within the minds of individuals; transferred and applied at will and with the purpose of extracting meaning from language in variable contexts for intended effects, having further effects resulting simply from the exercise of that skill, and therefore realising goods external to the context where the skill is exercised. Rather, literacy is inextricable from and always practised in social situations, shot through with the cultures and histories of the discourses and technologies operating in those situations, and playing a contested role in the realisation of goods intrinsic to the practice (Elliott, 2001). Literacy cannot have autonomy from these contexts, and has to be seen therefore as ideological. Street (1984, 1993) was the first to develop this view of models of literacy as autonomous or ideological, and together with Scribner and Cole (1981) and Heath (1983), laid the early basis for a “practice” approach to the study of literacy. This is elaborated further in Chapter Two.

Much of the research in the New Literacy Studies from then until the recent past (around 2002 or so) has continued to focus on bounded communities, groups,

sub-cultures or institutions, as has been traditional in ethnography (there are some notable exceptions and these are outlined in Chapter Two). This work came to articulate two key principles about literacy: firstly that there was no great divide between literacy and orality, and secondly, that literacy had to be viewed in context.

However, as Appadurai articulates above, just as the world does not consist of sets of stabilised contexts, literacy research cannot focus on discrete situations if it is to address broader questions of how power and social structure are regulated through spoken and written language and therefore of the conditions and possibilities for change. At a time when structures and processes in a range of domains of social life are increasingly regulated by world-wide standards (for example, ISOs and HACCPs<sup>1</sup>, qualification and accreditation frameworks) and people are forced to inscribe their actions and behaviours into textual formats which carry relations from outside the immediate context into the context of inscription (see Farrell, 2000; Belfiore et al, 2004), those involved in literacy research have to examine the ways in which “the material text creates a join between the local and the particular, the generalised and the generalising organisation of the ruling relations” (Smith, 1999:75).

A number of scholars are now starting to ask theoretical questions of the New Literacy Studies, with the aim of refining and extending NLS (Barton, 2001; Street, 2003b; Luke, 2004; Bloome et al, 2005; Kress and Street, in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006). One influential set of questions has been articulated in a recent review of the NLS (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). These authors pinpoint the problem of context

---

<sup>1</sup> ISOs are global forms of certification involving sets of standard operating procedures generated and monitored by the International Safety Organisation and applied in the vast majority of industrial, commercial and service enterprises. The ISO imposes methods for “product traceability” during all stages of production and service delivery, involving the identification of specific personnel responsible for each phase of work and the identification of their adherence to certified procedures monitored through the use of “non-conformance reports”. HACCPs is an acronym for a similar set of global monitoring procedures called Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points.

and question that an analysis of literacy in local context can provide an adequate explanation of the uses and valuings of literacy. Without wishing to revive the premises of autonomous models of literacy, they seek to open up new windows on ways of understanding literacy, asked in the following key questions:

But can we not recognise and theorise the transcontextual aspects of literacy without calling it decontextualised? Can we not approach literacy as a technology – and even as an agent – without falling back into the autonomous model? Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular, situated human interactions while also seeing how it regularly arrives from other places – infiltrating, disjoining and displacing local life? (Brandt and Clinton, 2002:343)

I believe that “we” (writers, researchers and practitioners concerned with a literacy in social practice perspective) cannot do the things the first two questions are asking. In Chapter Two I will outline my reasons for this and explain why I believe it is very important that these questions have been asked. I believe we can do what the third question asks but we have to find a method for doing it, and that is what I attempt in this thesis.

The research, therefore, attempts to answer the following questions:

- How does the view of literacy as situated social practice account for the movement of meanings across contexts?
- What units of analysis are necessary and sufficient for the study of the movement of meanings across contexts?
- What does the study of shifts of meaning making across contexts contribute to understandings of literacy, in particular the notion of literacy practices?
- How are the local and the non-local conceptualised as meaning making traverses contexts?

### **Widening the frame**

At the same time as I was working on the diagram about directionality of texts presented on page 1, I was observing classes in an adult literacy night school in the same shanty-town. The data from these observations provided a different way of seeing this movement of meanings across contexts. In the literacy class (which was attended by middle-aged ‘black’ women who had had minimal schooling in

their childhoods) materials that had been written by other adult learners in other classes were used as the basis for learning tasks, in one case a story called "Betty's story". This exercise proved extremely difficult for the learners who seemed unable to recognise the nature of the tasks (which were typical of early schooling - comprehension questions and 'cloze' exercises), nor to realise the demands of these tasks (Bernstein, 1996). I argued that the text on the page of the learners' workbook was already a reworking of the real Betty Sesedi's story in that she constructed this story within the expectations of a different transaction somewhere else at some other time. The simple act of typing the story and illustrating it with a photograph rather than presenting it as a handwritten text was a form of reworking it. The style, tone and topic of the text were supposed to render it accessible to the learners. However, although the relations between the sentences were not typically logical, the learners were being asked to accomplish logical, exacting and analytical tasks about the text. A more accurate way of seeing Betty's story is as a **recontextualisation** of the earlier story into the schooled literacy practices of the curriculum.

The concept of recontextualisation is central to Bernstein's sociology of education (1990, 1996). Recontextualisation according to Bernstein, is the transformation of discourses and texts involving selecting, relating, sequencing and pacing. As this transformation occurs when texts move or shift from context to context specialised identities (for example, curriculum developers, teachers and learners) emerge and are both recognised and realised. The space created by this shift or movement, according to Bernstein, is a space for the play of ideology and for the exercise of power and control<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernstein uses the concept of space in a number of different ways. He states that "...in the process of delocating a discourse...a gap or rather a space is created" (p47). He is using the term "space" metaphorically here. However, in developing an abstracted model of what he calls the "pedagogic device" (Chapter 2: 1996) he starts off with the concept of *space*, but translates that into *context*, and then into *site* or *position*. These

During the mid-1990s I applied the concept of recontextualisation to the study of the formation of pedagogic discourse in the context of literacy classes for adults in South Africa at a time of great change (Kell, 1997; 1998; 2000). In this thesis (and in other recent work [Kell, 2001; 2004; 2006]) I have returned to the concept of recontextualisation. This time I do not apply it in the study of pedagogic discourse, but instead at a more micro level to answer questions about the way in which meaning making is carried in texts from context to context. In this way I draw on and attempt to extend concerns articulated in linguistic anthropology (for example, by Silverstein and Urban, 1996; Blommaert, 2001a; 2001b; 2005) and in sociolinguistics by Rampton (2000), for example, when he claims that:

...analysis needs to address the multiple people and processes involved in the design or selection of textual 'projectiles' which have some hope of traveling across contexts, in the alteration and revaluation of texts in transportation, in their embedding in new contexts (p13).

Furthermore, as meanings are recontextualised, their authors and interpreters can switch their modes of communication or draw on varying degrees of multimodality. Just as the great divide between literacy and orality was deconstructed by scholars working in the NLS tradition, more recent work illustrates the lack of a divide between the linguistic mode of communication and others like the visual, aural, gestural and spatial modes of communication and representation.

Iedema (2003) has explored this phenomenon, calling it resemiotisation. Kress has led the field in detailing advances in the now allied field of what is called multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt and Kress, 2004; Kress and Street, in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006). When, why and how switches between modes of communication and representation are accomplished has become an important focus of my research, closely related to the above focus on recontextualisation.

---

terms are not used metaphorically. I grapple with these different uses of the concept of space and their realisation in different terms.

Consequently, although the research reported in this thesis is rooted in the study of literacy, it will become apparent that the theoretical frameworks guiding this research shift to some extent from the linguistic to the social semiotic.

### **Theoretical grounding**

I will briefly review some of the key concepts in the research questions in order to provide an overview of the central themes in this research.

#### **Movement of meanings across contexts**

Attempts to understand the social processes that mediate the relation between the local and the global are of great interest to social scientists. In the New Literacy Studies (NLS), each of these terms has been applied to what have been called multiple literacies, and depending on one's vantage point, global and local (as adjectives) have been characterised as hegemonic, dominant or simply 'distant' (Brandt and Clinton, 2002) as opposed to vernacular/'subaltern'/situated (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Maddox, in Street, 2001), or simply local (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Rogers, in Street, 2001). These descriptors, however, conflate two domains of inquiry – a spatial one with a social one involving relations of power. There is a growing body of work which draws attention to the fact that these relations (between for example, dominant and vernacular literacies) are not simple one-way processes involving imposition or resistance, but involve complex processes of mediation, of bricolage, of taking hold, of emerging hybridity, and of the importance of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Street, 1993; Maybin, 2003; Ahearn, 2004). Very recent work in literacy studies is starting to address this conflation between the two domains of inquiry mentioned above, in particular the recent collection edited by Leander and Sheehy (2004) called "Spatialising literacy practice". This thesis makes a contribution to such inquiry, but takes sociolinguistic

and linguistic anthropological perspectives, both of which disciplines have tended towards a pre-occupation with the concept of context.

NLS has offered studies which show how literacy (usually in the form of educational programmes and ideologies) 'comes to' and 'arrives in' local contexts from outside those contexts and the implications of this for practices (Street 1984, 1992, 2001; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996; Rogers, 1999; Robinson Pant, 2000). It has not yet however offered a convincing account at a micro level of how *texts* (written but also perhaps visual and multimodal) come to and arrive in local contexts from outside those contexts, what happens to them and where they go.

Wrapped up in this problem lie unresolved issues about the materiality of literacy – there seems to be a fear that once materiality becomes the focus, the autonomisation of literacy is likely to follow. It seems thus that there has been a kind of 'black-boxing' of accounts of movement of literacy across contexts.

Methodologically, ethnography, the key approach for studying literacy as social practice, has added to this problem by providing the means for studying literacy practices in bounded contexts, and an ever-increasing number of studies look at the local literacy practices of small communities, schools, families, workplaces, small islands, geographically contained communities and so on. This approach is echoed in the theory and research on situated learning (Rogoff, 1990; Lave, in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996) and "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) which add to the qualitative research lens turning inwards rather than outwards.

More recently, confirming and extending work undertaken within the new literacy studies, Street (2004a) has argued that Brandt and Clinton tend to characterise what they call "distant" literacies as "autonomous". Street has always maintained (and this lies at the heart of his autonomous and ideological models of literacy)



that what might be seen as distant or autonomous literacy needs to be seen as always and everywhere ideological, deeply imbued with issues of consciousness and power, identity and control. Street states that: "We need a framework and conceptual tools that can characterise the relation between local and 'distant'" (2004b) and suggests that the shift from studying literacy events to conceptualising literacy practices is one such tool. Furthermore, one of the key findings in many of the anthropological studies in Street's edited collections is the idea that as literacies arrive from other places they are taken hold of in local ways which involve hybridisation and emergence, as well as standardisation and imposition. Street argues that anthropological and educational discourses have shaped these ideas, but that it is important to also argue a response from a sociological perspective and he draws on Giddens' concept of disembedding mechanisms to do so. He argues that "literacy has the potential to disembed, to separate interaction from the particularities of locales and yet at the same time is always instantiated, its potential realised, through local practices" (2003a: 2829).

In this thesis I provide a slightly different and elaborated 'take' on this claim of Street's. While pinpointing analytical and methodological difficulties with the relation between the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices, I aim to provide tools for demonstrating and illuminating these instantiations and realisations.

At the same time more recent research into multi-modal communication and discourse analysis is enriching the New Literacy Studies (Kress, 2003; Iedema, 2003; Scollon and Scollon, 2004; Jewitt and Kress, 2004; Pahl and Rowsell, 2006; amongst others). In this research the lens looks at meaning-making or semiosis ***across modes of communication***; across the linguistic, the visual, the gestural

and so on. It does not necessarily, however, look at these shifts across contexts at a micro level.

The search for a framework and for tools to characterise the role of literacy in such movement across contexts without autonomising it, lies at the heart of this thesis. The thesis therefore interrogates the current tools, the concepts of literacy events and practices and most especially the *level* at which these have tended to be the subjects of study. It therefore reaches inside the relation between events and practices theoretically and methodologically, seeking principled warrants for claims to be made about this relation and therefore about the relation between the observed and the invisible, the empirical and the theoretical. It aims to add to the set of tools available for understanding this relation, in the form of a language of description.

### Units of analysis

Kress and Street (in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006) state that what the NLS has added to understandings of literacy has been:

...the recognition that reading and writing vary across *cultural time and space* – the meanings associated with them vary for participants and are rooted in social relationships, including crucially relationships of power. Indeed the very definitions of what counts as literacy already frame social relationships of literacy and what people can do with it...(pviii) (my emphasis – CK).

In what follows I will interrogate what it is that we understand by the terms “cultural time and space” and who “participants” in cultural time and space are. In my previous work I studied what I thought was cultural time and space as well as the participants in this time and space (for example, in Kell [1994; 1996], these participants included local resident, Winnie Tsotso, and non-local resident, a Welsh priest in Site 5 in 1993). But I came up against problems, which I saw as limitations in the scope of the research. What I came to see was that these were

limitations in the conceptual tools that I was working with, the concepts of literacy events and practices. These concepts were absolutely valid at a certain level of analysis, when **context** was defined in **general** terms as “cultural space and time”, with the concept of community being invoked, and with participants as the people who lived their lives in this general space and time. I used discourse theory to explore the situating of this particular space, time and participants in broader social and historical forces. But when I started to go into a very detailed analysis of communicative events at the micro level, it was difficult to define what the boundaries of this particular “space” and “time” were and what “participation” was defined by. In addition, I could not find a **principled warrant** for making claims about the relation between events, practices and discourse. Analytically, I could **hold** “a literacy event” stable for my research, but I could not hold the levels of practices and discourse accountable to the event. People moved in and out of discourses, practices shifted according to participants and participants came in and out of different cultural spaces and times. As is now well known, a more Foucauldian understanding of power (1977, 1982) means that power cannot be seen as uni-directional, a participant might hold power or exercise power in one moment but not in the next, even within what might be called the same cultural space and time. In retrospect, I felt that I was making claims that could not be justified from the data.

Given the broader questions I set for myself (in this thesis) about movement across contexts, I realised that I needed to embark on the more specific task of pinpointing what needed to *hold* stable as a unit of analysis in order for claims to be made about that which cannot be observed empirically. The focus of this thesis is therefore methodological.

Obviously the way in which one understands context lies at the heart of these concerns and this is a key theme. Earlier, structuralist versions of context contained at their core a dualism – the idea that context is a container for social action. Lave (in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996:22) describes Latour pointing out that when most people talk about context they sketch in the air a shell about the shape and size of a pumpkin. Lave then quotes McDermott as stating that:

In all commonsense uses of the terms context refers to an empty slot, a container, into which other things are placed. It is the “con” that contains the “text”, the bowl that contains the soup. As such it shapes the contours of its contents; it has its effects only at the borders of the phenomenon under analysis... The soup does not shape the bowl, and the bowl most certainly does not alter the substance of the soup. Text and context, soup and bowl....can be analytically separated and studied on their own without doing violence to the complexity of the situation. A static sense of context delivers a stable world (McDermott, in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996: 282).

A somewhat later version of this was the idea of the figure/ground relationship (Linell, 1998), or the focal event/field of action idea (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992).

Context was thus seen as a frame surrounding the event being examined and providing resources for its appropriate interpretation. However, Duranti and Goodwin (ibid:24), amongst many others, then pointed out that “context is an entirely unstable unit”. They argued that in analysing context it was crucial to take the perspective of the participants whose behaviour was being analysed as the point of departure. Furthermore, participants’ articulation of their environment is shaped by the activities of the moment, the context that is relevant to what they are doing changes radically when they move from one activity to another.

These kinds of questions were related to the earlier field of study which Gumperz (1977) termed “conversational inferencing”, leading to studies of the moments in conversation when participants make social judgements about people and situations based on small details of linguistic or interactional style. These inferences form the basis of “contextualisation” and occur through the deployment

of what Gumperz has identified as “contextualisation cues” which enable participants to evaluate message meaning and sequencing patterns in relation to the surface structure of the message (Gumperz, in Jaworski and Coupland, 1999). More recent work has refined the notion of contextualisation through focusing on indexicality (for example, Hanks, 1990; Wortham, in Wortham and Rymes, 2003; Blommaert, 2005), on “how linguistic signs come to have meaning in cultural and interactional context” (Wortham, in Wortham and Rymes, 2003:9).

While the concepts of contextualisation cues and indexicality have contributed to the theoretical frameworks of my thesis, the focus of much of the research in this area is almost exclusively on spoken language and conversation which means that it is not appropriate for the purposes of my study. While focusing on modes of communication in themselves, the need in this thesis is primarily to focus on the role of communicative resources in relation to social practices as meaning making shifts from context to context.

Lea (2004) presents the view that there is a need for scholars within the NLS to bring in different theoretical perspectives, and mentions work undertaken by scholars who see their work as primarily based within the NLS but who draw on Actor Network Theory and Activity Theory. In addition, with reference to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) she states that: “work on situated learning and communities of practice has become almost ubiquitous in the writings of many who adopt an NLS framework” (Lea, 2004:6).

My early attempts (Kell, 2000) to analyse my data drew on the “communities of practice” perspective (Wenger, 1999), but I found limitations which are outlined in the following chapters. I have therefore chosen to work with an activity theoretical approach (Engestrom, 1987, 1996; Cole and Engestrom, 1993; Russell 1997, amongst others) in which context is identified with activity systems. Briefly, activity

theory draws on early socio-cultural analysis initiated by Leont'ev and Vygotsky and articulates the value of understanding how meaning is mutually constituted between persons acting and activity systems. In this interaction, what Vygotsky called "cultural tools", including both language and technologies are essential parts of such processes and the approach therefore "integrates the subject, the object and the instruments (material tools as well as signs and symbols) into a unified whole" (Engestrom, 1996:35). An activity system is an on-going, object-directed, tool-mediated human interaction which is historically conditioned. Discursive tools in particular mediate between the actors/agents, the motive or direction of the activity and the object of the activity (its outcome). Russell (1997) argues that activity theory can facilitate the analysis of writing and learning by allowing us to theorise and trace the interactions among people and the inscriptions called texts (and other material tools): "without separating either from collective ongoing motivated action over time" (p509).

In my view, however, there is still a problem in relation to activity systems as units of analysis. How big or small are they? Where do they begin and end? What are their spatial locations and timescales, and how are the actors or agents undertaking the activities defined in relation to each other? Proposals for answering these questions are an important part of the work of this thesis.

I adopt activity systems as units of analysis, however I apply the concept at a more micro scale than has been done by researchers in this field to this point, and with adaptations.

Further linked units of analysis are the collective ongoing motivated sequences of events within organisational processes which are intended to lead to the achievement of stated purposes - the 'development process' in South Africa, more specifically the building of housing. I call these sequences "meaning-making

trajectories", borrowing from Blommaert (2001) who identifies what he calls "text trajectories" and with reference to what Silverstein and Urban (1996) call "iterations of textuality" or "life cycles of discourse" (p3). Although the focus of the work was literacy and the major frame of reference is the New Literacy Studies, text trajectories was too narrow a term for my field of study as I realised that I was not only focusing on linguistic texts, but on meaning-making processes prior to and after their 'fixing' as text. Text is one moment of codification in the ongoing meaning making process, moment by moment, and meanings may or may not be carried by text. Anthropologists, Bowker and Star (1999) use the term trajectories without specific reference to text, and I have been influenced by their work. In addition, it is difficult to separate the term text from the linguistic written mode and I felt that it was necessary to find a unit of analysis that freed meaning-making up from mode, thus enabling the analysis to pinpoint the factors leading to choice of modes, the switching between modes and the couplings of modes; and therefore the identification of the affordances of different modes (ledema, 2003; Kress 2003; Norris, 2004).

At the core of this set of concerns is an argument in favour of acknowledging the "materiality of texts" (Smith, 1999) but against the idea of literacy as "transcontextualising agent" (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). Instead, the argument shows the necessity of viewing texts as constantly recontextualising meanings and it is in this constant process that power/control may accrue or not accrue to individuals, in processes of struggle. As Mertz (in Silverstein and Urban, 1996:231) claims:

Processes of entextualisation and recontextualisation play a vital role in struggles over social power and modern American society, the unfixing and recentering of discourse performs a pivotal role as the semiotic mediation of social transformation.

## **Earlier Questions**

I initially set out a different direction for the current research guided by an earlier research question:

- What are the pedagogical implications of an ideological model of literacy? (Question One)

This original Question One resulted from my Site 5 research (from which the diagram on page 1 is drawn) which became part of a much larger research project known as the Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) (reported in Prinsloo and Breier, 1996; and the Social Uses of Literacy Research reports, 1997) and later research projects which I undertook at the University of Cape Town between 1996 and 2000. The overall scope of these projects is reported on in Kell (2003).

A second related question to this was:

- Can the informal promotion of literacy take place within everyday contexts? (Question Two)

These Questions One and Two provided the basis for a funded research contract within a housing development project that relied on participatory methods to enable people to build their own houses. The funded project was intended to further the work of the Social Uses of Literacy project, and the data in this thesis is drawn from that project. The approach taken in the project combined ethnography with planned interventions in an attempt to assess possibilities for embedding the informal promotion of literacy in development work. This combination of ethnography and intervention influenced the type of data collected for this thesis and the overall methodology.

I therefore briefly outline the aims of the funded project. The project proposal for the funded project (Kell, 1997a) outlined some of the key findings of the Social Uses of Literacy project thus:



1. Unschooled people make use of a range of strategies to acquire literacy skills informally (outside of formal instruction). These skills enable them to achieve and accomplish important goals and tasks in their everyday lives. The strategies are always highly context-specific and involve:

- apprenticeship learning within social networks
- the use of a specific range of informal literacy mediators
- supported self-instruction within the context of the family, the church or the workplace.

2. In the South African context of oppression, underdevelopment and denial of access to education, literacy is often used for the purposes of social control and gate-keeping. The strategies listed above are not necessarily always empowering to individuals but may be used by groupings of people for the purposes of social differentiation and stratification. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) provision which locates the problem in the deficit of individuals is therefore not necessarily going to provide redress. Strategies for institutional change that are compatible with South Africa's move towards democratisation and reconstruction need to be promoted.

3. Unschooled people's understandings and strategies around literacy contrasted with the intentions and practices of the introduced literacies of formal provision. The SoUL researchers claimed that the gap between the multiple literacies of everyday life and the introduced literacies of formal provision is an important contributing factor to the lack of success of literacy work in South Africa.

The funded project aimed to:

- Promote the informal acquisition of literacy, numeracy and information technology skills amongst unschooled participants of 'self-build' housing schemes
- Develop a model for reproducing this informal promotion within a wider range of development projects
- Assess whether the acquisition of such informally acquired skills will facilitate increased access to formal education for unschooled adults.

The research site was a development project where future residents were building their own homes. The residents were comprised of a majority of unschooled adults and the house-building process “clearly involves numerous literacy and numeracy demands. These included ordering, measuring, reading and writing invoices, legal documents, notices, plans, calculating recording and so on” (Kell, 1997a: 3). The proposal claimed that:

Particular configurations of literacy and language practices can either impede or facilitate participation in development, and these will differ according to the histories and organisational cultures of the projects. On the basis of the SoUL research it can safely be assumed that the target group is already acquiring some literacy skills through enculturation in the building process, and that significant others (organisational leadership, development workers, community based activists) are already playing the role of mentors for apprenticeship purposes and acting as literacy mediators.

A detailed ethnographic study of the literacy and numeracy demands of the building process will need to be undertaken, through participant observation. In addition, the literacy histories and practices of the core target group will be documented and analysed in detail.

On the basis of this data, an intervention strategy will be developed for self-consciously promoting literacy within the building process itself, addressing the associated literacy and numeracy demands....The intervention will include some of the following elements which will be introduced within the logic of the development process and organisational culture:

- Self conscious reflection amongst core target group of their own strategies for informally acquiring literacy skills and their own literacy histories and networks
- Phased increase of minimal textual demands within social networks and the monitoring of the core target group's responses
- Spreading of individual literacy tasks beyond the reach of those already playing the role of significant others
- Reproduction and dissemination of key texts (invoices, order forms, minutes) amongst the core target group
- Monitoring of their access to these texts and the introduction of paired reading of such texts
- Production of new texts to be produced by the core target group itself
- Dissemination and monitoring jointly of such texts

- Self-conscious reflection with existing community-based mentors and mediators on ways in which they can transfer their skills and training in methods of transfer
- Training of mentors and mediators in translation and interpretation theory and issues in the development of 'Plain English' texts. (All drawn from Kell, 1997a: 3-5)

The funded project did not provide any easy answers to the two original questions and these are discussed in Kell (2005b), as well as touched on throughout this thesis. However, as I explored both the field data and the theoretical area I felt that what I was learning was better suited to more focused theoretical and methodological questions, rather than pedagogical ones. These eventually became the research questions presented on page 6.

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter Two provides the theoretical orientation, in the form of a review of the literature. I trace the development of the 'literacy as social practice' approach over the past three to four decades, and its consolidation in the New Literacy Studies. The resultant challenge to the great divide thinking that had previously characterised the field is outlined. I explore growing changes in understandings of language, text and discourse, drawing on social semiotic theories of language (Halliday, 1978; Kress, 1985), but also broader social theory, in particular the work of Foucault (1977), Smith (1992 and 1999) and Bernstein (1996). I then characterise what I call four recent challenges to the NLS as the 4Ms:

- materiality
- multiple literacies/multi-literacies/literacy practices
- multimodality and
- models (following Street's autonomous or ideological models).

I explore the implications of these challenges in general and in relation to the focus of this thesis.

Chapter Three is an exploration of ethnography as both a theoretical field and as methodology. The reason for this overlap lies in the contested understandings of “ethnography”, which has become crystallised as a debate between epistemology and methodology (Blommaert, 2001; Street, 2001). I work with the idea of a language of description (Bernstein, 1996) considering how this translates into a consideration of the emic/etic distinction methodologically. I outline four key difficulties that I had experienced in my earlier work and show how these were related to the general challenges to the NLS characterised as the 4Ms in Chapter Two. These key difficulties are:

1. The need to move beyond single instance events to sequences of events
2. Defining the boundaries of context and the problem with making inferences about literacy practices
3. The need to see literacy as one amongst many modes of communication and representation
4. The need for warrants for making claims about the relation between literacy, power and social structure.

Chapter Four is the first chapter in which data is presented. It is presented as a narrative of a series of events observed and recorded on site as well as a narrative of the way I started to conceptualise my analysis of these events. Fairly intuitively, developing a language of description for this sequence of events was enabling me to see the processes more clearly. I called the sequence a “trajectory”, it was broken down into what I called “strips”<sup>3</sup>. The term “node”<sup>4</sup> was used to pinpoint social interactional moments in each strip when modes of communication and representation played a part in the direction of the trajectory. Context was conceptualised as activity system, and activity as purposeful action undertaken

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<sup>3</sup> In choosing this term I draw on the work of Goffman (1986:10), but also differ from the way in which he defines and uses the term as “any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity...as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them. A strip is not meant to reflect a natural division made by the subjects of enquiry or an analytical division made by students who enquire”. As explained in later chapters my use of this term is etic. I do not argue that the strips I identify are perceived from the perspective of those involved in the stream of activity, but used the term as a heuristic to demarcate slices within the stream of activity for the purposes of analysis.

<sup>4</sup> The term “node” is used without reference to a particular body of scholarship, but influences have been drawn from computer sciences and network theory, as well as cognitive science (Shank and Abelson [1977] in Nooteboom (1999).

within participant frameworks by individual actors or groups, accomplished through mediational means (one of which is literacy). The concept of nodes was then applied to highlight the intersection of different activity systems – a point of crossing, and therefore of recontextualisation. The key entextualisation process in this chapter is the writing of a story by the agent of the trajectory called Nomathamsanqa or Noma. The writing and reading of the story can be seen as nodes and the story itself can be seen as a “join” (Smith, 1999) between different activity systems. I argue that both the entextualisation process and the text-artifact produced were reified for particular reasons. This process of reification was increased by the movement of the meaning making process across contexts, as it shifted modes.

In Chapter Five, I took the approach generated in Chapter Four and applied it to another sequence of events, called “Trajectory Two: Purchasing building materials”. The scope of this trajectory was more limited; I call it a micro trajectory, but the purpose of choosing this trajectory is to demonstrate that the tools are flexible and can be used to analyse processes at different scales. The agent of the trajectory (i.e. the person who was buying building materials) was a woman called MamaSolani, a participant in the house-building project. Entextualisation processes and text-artifacts acted as “joins”, connecting the meaning making across contexts. The trajectory is again broken down into strips and nodes are identified. In Chapter Five I also address the first two of the four problems directly, showing the value of revealing what happens as meaning making crosses contexts. I focus largely on the concept of nodes, as one of the elements in the language of description. I discuss how the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices are important for this analysis, showing what light they can throw on the processes. But I also show where the limitations of the concepts are, and where

they need to be complemented by others. Context and power relations are closely analysed in order to understand the moves in this trajectory. I conclude by arguing that literacy was *naturalised* in this trajectory as opposed to the way it was *reified* in the previous one, and that the joins drew on forms of standardisation which acted as boundary objects, facilitating the relations between activity systems and people's actions.

In Chapter Six I again identified a further trajectory: called "Trajectory Three: Recording activeness". The focus of this chapter is on consolidating the language of description and it involves a reflexive charting of the way in which the elements of the language of description were derived from the analysis of the events on site, i.e. the relation between the emic and the etic. The data in Chapter Six was drawn from an early phase in the project where house sites were allocated on the basis of a criterion called "activeness". I trace the way in which this concept became codified, recorded and translated across time and space. The purposeful activity studied in this trajectory is the recording processes (drawing up of lists) leading to the allocation of sites to members who had been established as qualifying through various forms of participation or "activeness" within the organisation. The subject of this is members of the Management Committee who needed to achieve a "plan" whereby members of Khayaletu knew where their sites were so that they could start building their houses. The absence of standardisation in the recording process seems to create space for reification again, and ultimately for conflict between activity systems.

Chapter Seven takes a different approach in that it identifies a further trajectory: "Trajectory Four: Accommodating an oversized house", but it shows how this trajectory intersects with Trajectory Three in two particular meetings. I therefore show how the approach can be used to study complex intertwined processes. In

this chapter I focus more clearly on the third and fourth key problems, i.e.

multimodality and the need to find a warrant for claims about literacy, power and social structure. I refer this back to questions of discourse and history.

In each of these chapters I trace the meaning making trajectory as it traverses different contexts and modes in relation to the overall meaning making purpose.

Each trajectory involves verbal discussions, written texts, the physical transporting of texts from one context to another and the recontextualisation and resemiotisation of the texts in further contexts.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by outlining and discussing the language of description, and what it reveals. At this point I make some claims about literacy practices in the research site, arguing that these are the invisibles that the language of description has helped make visible. I return to the original questions and assess the effectivity of the answers provided in the thesis. I outline the contribution of the thesis and indicate where further work could be undertaken, reflecting on social theory more generally,

## Chapter Two. Tracing theoretical roots

*It is a time for going back to quite fundamental questions, asking old questions again, in the light of new givens and the new difficulties they bring. What are the cultural technologies which are at issue here – the technologies of dissemination of meanings (the media), those of representation of meanings (the modes), and those of production of messages (print and paper, digitality and electronics)? How do they interact, what becomes possible for whom, where is power likely to shift, who is likely to gain and who is likely to lose, and what is our role as academics in all that? (Kress and Street, in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006:ix)*

### Introduction

This thesis has its theoretical roots in the New Literacy Studies, which views literacy as social practice, described and analysed through the study of literacy events and literacy practices, and, on the basis of which claims can be made about literacy in society. The New Literacy Studies in its turn to social practice was following a more general turn in language studies, where the focus shifted from structure and system to meaning and use. One of the most influential moves in this 'turn' was made by Hymes (1964, 1972, 1974 and 1977) who proposed that there should be a new linguistic science called the ethnography of communication. By insisting that ethnography rather than linguistics, and communication rather than language, "must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be assessed", Hymes strongly invoked the centrality of the concepts of context and community:

...(there awaits)... a science that would approach language neither as abstracted form nor as an abstract correlate of a community, but as situated in the flux and pattern of communicative events (Hymes, 1977:12).

An exploration of these two concepts (context and community) and their relevance for the study of practices lies at the heart of this thesis. Both the move to social practice and the assertion of the importance of context and community were influential in the field of linguistic anthropology as well as within socio-linguistics.



But these moves were also echoed within the field of psychology with the shift towards exploring learning in practice, situated learning and activity theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Engestrom, 1997; Chaiklin and Lave, 1996). Each of these fields has drawn on and had an influence on research around literacy and literacy learning.

In this chapter I present developments within the study of literacy and the emergence of the New Literacy Studies. I then outline challenges to the NLS which have emerged over the past ten years or so. As a researcher within this tradition since 1993 I weave in some examples from previous research and the questions that I have asked myself over this period.

### **Emergence of the New Literacy Studies**

The first moves in this 'turn' to practice and the assertion of the importance of context took place in the early 1980s. Firstly, Scribner and Cole, after their lengthy experimental work amongst the Vai in Liberia published "The Psychology of Literacy" in 1981. Scribner and Cole's research demonstrated that it was not literacy that was the variable determining differences between literate and non-literate people, but schooling. In answering their question "Can one distinguish among the effects of different forms of literacy used for different functions in the life of an individual or society?" they found that each form of literacy existing amongst the Vai was associated with specific skills and domains of activity. This led them to put forward what they called a "practice account of literacy":

...(this) notion of practice guides the way we seek to understand literacy. Instead of focusing on the technology of a writing system and its reputed consequences ("alphabetic literacy fosters abstraction for example) we approach literacy as a set of organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script, but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use.

They defined practice as a recurrent goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge (ibid:236).

Also in 1981, Ron and Suzanne Scollon published "Narrative, Literacy and Face in Inter-ethnic Communication". On the basis of their research amongst the Athabaskans in Alaska, the Scollons claimed that the acquisition of a new form of literacy is not simply a matter of learning a new technology, it also involves the acquisition of new values, social practices and ways of knowing that may conflict with those already in place amongst the Athabaskans.

Heath, after ten years of ethnographic research, published "Ways with Words" in 1983. Heath's approach was located firmly within Hymes's "ethnography of communication", drawing on the idea of "speech event" from this tradition. Heath applied this concept to written communication rather than just spoken forms – i.e. "literacy events" became a key unit of analysis for scholars in this field after the publication of "Ways with Words". Literacy events are those occasions in which written language is implicated in participants' interactions and their interpretative processes and strategies and Heath interprets them in relation to larger socio-cultural patterns which they exemplify or reflect. By identifying the differences in literacy events across the three groups studied, Heath demonstrated the lack of value in the oral/literate dichotomy and brought to light a set of features that cross-classified the groups in various ways.

Street, after his ethnographic research on literacy in Iran, published "Literacy in Theory and Practice" in 1984. In this work, Street characterised the prevailing conceptualisations of literacy as embodying an autonomous view, where literacy, regardless of context, was seen as producing particular universal characteristics and giving rise to particular positive effects. In contrast, Street proposed an ideological model which allows us:

...to concentrate on the specific social practices of reading and writing. The ideological and therefore culturally embedded nature of such practices is recognised. This model stresses the importance of the socialisation process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for participants and is therefore concerned with the general social institutions through which this process takes place and not just the explicit educational ones...It concentrates on the overlap and interaction of oral and literate modes rather than stressing a "great divide" (1984:2).

Just as importantly, Street extended Heath's application of the term "literacy events", embedding it in a broader concept, that of "literacy practices", thereby articulating what has become a further key unit of analysis for those working in literacy studies. He saw this as a broader concept, pitched at a higher level of abstraction and referring to both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading or writing. A key question he asked was ***'what is the relationship between literacy events and literacy practices in a given situation?'***

Street's identification of literacy practices within different domains of life in Iran led to the idea of different literacies, *maktab* literacy practices, associated with the primary Qur'anic school; schooled literacy practices in the more secular and modernising context of the State school; and commercial literacy practices associated with buying and selling fruit for transport to the city and market. With this exemplification of literacy practices associated with different domains of social activity, Street contested the idea of a reified autonomous notion that there was only one thing called literacy with a capital L and small y, singular and autonomous in the sense that it was the factor that independently had effects on other things.

In a bold, programmatic statement, Street claimed that the application of these terms enables us to see more clearly "the underlying theoretical assumptions on literacy, to recognize cleavages in the field, to expose hidden contradictions and to begin the work of cross-cultural comparison and generalisation on the basis of a worked out model of literacy" (1988). And this is exactly what has happened. A

wide range of studies have been undertaken, inspired in many cases by Street's ideas and testifying to the robustness of the basic concepts and the strength of Street's vision. The work undertaken at Lancaster University, from the very early 1990s onwards under the guidance of David Barton and Mary Hamilton, in particular, has played a role in consolidating and extending the New Literacy Studies (Barton and Ivanic, 1991; Barton, 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; amongst others).

An important aspect of the extending of the field was the integration of the above set of concepts with discourse theory. Street had constantly raised the importance of discourse theory in relation to his ideological model, and the embedding of literacies within discourses (for example, in his Introduction in Street, 1993). Gee (1991) however, drawing on Krashen, took this a step further by making the claim that the acquisition of literacy and participation in literacy practices involves the acquisition of a discourse and the taking on of practices associated with that discourse, and that becoming literate involves both processes of acquisition and of learning.

It is necessary at this point to go more deeply into the concept of discourse, and its relation with the concept of practice. I draw mostly on Foucault (1972, 1977, 1982) whose work has laid the basis for much of what we understand by the concept.

### **Discourse, practice and text**

At the centre of Foucault's work, what he calls his "central theme" (1972:114) lies the idea of the statement, the "enonce". Statements have autonomy, contain truth claims and constitute discursive formations (1972:38). But for Foucault, how is it that one statement rather than another appears? By asking this question Foucault shows us that social processes and 'realities' cannot be "taken as self-evident, as

innocuous 'things-in-the-world' " and he enables us "to interrogate and denaturalise ordinariness" (Kapitzke, 1995: 8).

It is through language that people construct and reconstruct objects of knowledge, and surround them with concepts, beliefs and rules, constructing identities too. But as Hall (in Wetherell et al, 2001:72) points out: Just as a discourse rules in certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself, so also by definition, it rules out limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic, or constructing knowledge about it. In this way, unspoken rules (or ground-rules that can only be apprehended) lead to truths, and to "regimes of truth".

A discursive practice, as defined by Foucault is:

...a body of anonymous, historical rules always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function(1972:117).

Discourse cannot exist without a communicative mode by which it is realised in practice. The field of discourse studies is highly developed with regard to the linguistic mode of communication. However, in Foucault's understanding of what statements are, however, he shows that they are not necessarily utterances, neither are they grammatical entities; even maps can be statements if they are used as representations of a geographical area, or a picture of the layout of a keyboard (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:45). Foucault's concept of discourse is about language and practice.

A clearer understanding of what is meant by the term practice is necessary.

Discourse can simply be viewed as language use seen as a type of social practice. Scribner and Cole's definition of practice provided a useful frame for articulating new perspectives on literacy, but the concept has been taken up much

more widely in the social sciences. A number of writers point out that social structure defines what is possible, social events constitute what is actual and the relationship between potential and actual is mediated by social practices (Lemke, 1995; Fairclough, 2003, amongst others). Practices can be seen as social activities performed on a regular basis, although with variation. Practices instantiate meaning. In contrast with events, they embody the ideas the actors hold about the events and they are constituted by connected and overlapping sets of rules that organise and give them coherence. Values and interests become sedimented in the constitutive rules of practice (Cherryholmes, 1988:4). Practices can be seen as having two moments – the social (interactional) and the semiotic.

As explained above, discourse cannot exist without a modality by which it is realised in practice. Early social semiotic definitions of *text* such as Halliday's (1978) see it as: "instances of linguistic interaction in which people actually engage: whatever is said or written in an operational context. And that it may be more useful to think of text as encoded in sentences rather than composed of them". Hodge and Kress use the term "text" in an extended semiotic sense to refer to a structure of messages or message traces which has a socially ascribed unity. They refer to text as the concrete material object produced in discourse (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Most references to text are rooted in the linguistic mode, either spoken or written. However, some writers have stressed that texts are instantiations of discourse that can be realised in any mode. Very recently, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001:24) have insisted that the semiotic instances in which they are interested – "the texts – include the everyday practices of ordinary humans as much as the articulations of discourses in more conventionally text-like objects such as magazines, TV programmes and so on". It is possible for the

arrangement of furniture in a space to be seen as a text. In this case then, text can be seen as practice and practice can be seen as text.

I will return to this point later, but many would refer to a process of “reading” for example the layout of furniture in a room. Street (1996) has maintained that it is conceptually more coherent to reserve the use of the term literacy for matters involving print. However, if the arrangement of furniture in a room is a communicative statement involving both articulation and interpretation what terms should then be used for the communicative processes involved here?

### **Challenges to the New Literacy Studies**

A series of important challenges to the NLS started appearing from about the mid-1990s. There had always been critique and debate about the premises of the NLS, in the main, focusing on the issue of relativism versus universalism, of particular claims versus normative claims (see for example, Street’s response to McCabe, in Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). Street, in particular, has continued to scrutinise these debates, responding and arguing, continually enriching the terms and premises of the NLS (2003; 2005; 2006).

In my view the challenges can be grouped into four main themes. I have called these the four Ms, each of which links to and connects with the others:

- materiality
- multiliteracies
- multimodality
- models

These challenges started to be articulated in the mid- to late-1990s, with impetus arising from a seminar held at Lancaster University in 1997, called “Expanding the New Literacy Studies”. At this seminar, draft chapters were presented for the book later published as “Situated Literacies” (Barton et al, 2000). An unpublished paper

reporting on this event provides the basis for the discussion over the next few pages:

...questions were raised about whether we were talking about “literacies”, literacy practices” or “literacy events”. How do we understand the use of the term literacies in concepts like “computer literacy, film literacy” etc? How do we understand print literacy in relation to other semiotic systems and communication channels? Is “literacy events” a theoretical or a methodological tool? How exactly are “practices” extrapolated from “events”? (Kell, 1997b).

Hamilton’s paper (in Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000) focused on the elements in a literacy event: These are the participants, the settings, the artifacts and the activities. Inferred from literacy events are the non-visible constituents of literacy practices. Corresponding with the four elements of the event are four elements of practice – hidden participants; the domain of practice; artifacts and resources (which may also be non-material) and structured routines or pathways that facilitate or regulate actions (Hamilton, in Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000:17).

This approach begged a number of questions. Heath’s definition of literacy events (1982) is “occasions in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes.” But Hamilton asked: does that then rule out for consideration any situation where an artifact of literacy is present, but is not interacted with by people? Through analysing newspaper photographs that included literacy artifacts, Hamilton developed additional categories for analysing literacy practices. These were: literacy in the environment, literacy on the body and reproductions of documents. Hamilton draws on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s “Grammar of Visual Design” as a starting point for this work, saying that (a structured approach such as Kress and Van Leeuwen’s) “enables the researcher to offer a clear account of the process by which readings of an image can be justified and challenged”. I argued in Kell (1997b) this may be appropriate for the analysis of events (which are moments in time rather like



snapshots) but is not appropriate when analysing practices because the concept of practices stretches both back into the history of the practice and forwards into the future of the practice. Time is thus an inescapable dimension of understanding practices.

The category called “literacy on the body” raised a further set of questions.

Hamilton mentioned the use of the body “as a writing surface; the skin itself, branding, tattooing, painting” arguing that this was “an extension of the extremely widespread practices of decorating the human body with a **variety of visual semiotics** long-studied by anthropologists” (Hamilton, 2000:30, my emphasis).

In my unpublished report I suggested that it is in this shift from print literacy to “the variety of visual semiotics” that a possible rupture within the NLS occurs (Kell, 1997b). Street had always argued for limiting the scope of NLS to print literacy, and in a discussion around the plurality of literacies has argued against the use of the concept in other domains of social life. The idea of a “plurality of literacies” comes from “the metaphorical extension of the concept of literacy to other domains of social life, such as computing, politics etc. One even hears of emotional literacy” (Street, 1997). Quoting Kress, Street argued that:

Apart from glib and lazy rhetorical usages, Kress also sees these extensions as flawed in that they fail to see language as just one of many modes of communication. ‘Because it is seen as the only real mode, as the most highly developed, the one that sustains thought and rationality, all other modes of communication, or for that matter all cultural systems, have to be described as being literacy. This devalues the term so that it comes to mean nothing more than skill (as in keyboard skills) or competence’ (Kress, 1997: 115). This then raises the question of the boundaries of what is included under the term literacy, which Kress and I would agree is a multiple and complex of phenomena, including print, text as block, letters, text as genre, letters as sound, media layout etc. (Street, 1997:48)

Now this would seem to work against many NLS writers who have been using the term “literacy” much more broadly, and perhaps, metaphorically. In at least two of the chapters in *Situated Literacies* (de Pourbaix and Wilson, in Barton et al, 2000),

reference is made to “computer literacy”, symbolic literacy”, “subversive literacies”, and “emotional literacies”. Gee explains that becoming literate involves the acquisition of a secondary discourse which does not necessarily have to involve print. However in an earlier and influential paper, the New London Group (1996) claimed that the “multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches. They then introduced the term “Multiliteracies”: “Meta-languages to describe and interpret the design elements of different modes of meaning” which are extended to include linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural and visual.

Kapitzke (1995:8), drawing on the understanding of literacy as a “set of social practices using a technology of inscription” allows for a broader interpretation of “literacy”. Foucault (1979) examines the way in which power is *inscribed* on bodies through processes and mechanisms of surveillance, supervision and self-regulation in institutions such as prisons, schools and hospitals. In her research on literacy in a day hospital, Harries (1996) although starting off with a description of literacy practices associated with print literacy, goes on to explore the way in which:

...the body through the action of medical literacies becomes a social text capable of being read and interpreted. Through the medical ‘gaze’ the body is read as an assemblage of symptoms and diseases (Harries, 1996:87).

Further, Wilson (in Barton et al, 2000) gives an example of what she calls a “literacy-linked” event of prison warders ‘defacing’ (marking them with stripes in felt-pens) a pair of trainers to make them look like Adidas trainers so that a prisoner would wear them – but instead he demands that they should have ‘defaced’ them in such a way that they looked like Nikes! Are the participants in this event engaged in a set of social practices using a technology of inscription,

which would allow us to interpret it as “literacy”, or is the interpretation of this event as Street suggests, a “metaphorical extension” of the concept of literacy which amounts to ‘slippage’, not worthy of a place within the theory and research of the NLS?

Both Harries and Wilson counterpose “social literacies” with the dominant literacy associated with mainstream institutions – the hospital and the prison. Wilson (drawing on Bhaba, 1994) analyses the way in which a “third space” in which these social literacies are enacted, develops, which draws on both Literacy and literacies, Prison and prisons. She argues:

Official literacy, for example – by which I mean the vast quantity of official, standardised, and universally administered documentation – remains within Street’s (1993) parameter of ‘dominant’ institutionally-grounded literacy only while it remains detached from an event or practice. An official, standardised Canteen form given out to prisoners at a set time on a given day and supplied for ordering items from the shop ‘escapes’ from Barton’s concept of ‘imposed’ or ‘constrained’ practices when it becomes a shopping list in the hands of its recipients – especially when it is re-appropriated (as I have seen) to include a request for machine guns, grappling hooks, large-breasted women or substantial quantities of illegal substances! (Wilson, in Barton et al, 2000:60).

Wilson further argues that:

...not only has the model and existence of autonomous Literacy often been overlooked in studies which have been concerned with the social nature of vernacular literacies but that to reduce the discussion of communicative practice to an either/or detracts from the very real possibility – at least within the prison environment – that people have not only an awareness of Literacy and literacies but (as I have shown) choose to re-appropriate both as a means by which to determine the culturally-specific features of their everyday lives (ibid: 61).

Now, my understanding of Street’s concept of the autonomous/ideological models is that the ideological subsumes the autonomous – that even when literacy develops or is used in contexts most highly associated with autonomy and context-independence it is still ideological, social. According to Street it may be dominant but it is still social literacy because it is enacted in social contexts.

While having difficulties with the idea of “metaphorical extension” of literacy into other domains, I agree with Kress (and Street) when they say that “(these extensions) fail to see language as just one of many modes of communication”. The New London Group does put linguistic meaning alongside spatial, gestural, visual and audio. Yet in calling this complex of modes of making meaning “multiliteracies”, they seem to fall into the trap outlined by Street:

....the reference to computer and graphic images as ‘literacies’ gains its meaning from the power and prestige of literacy as the term is used in contemporary society, that is its association with civilisation, competence, progress. If processing graphic images is described as a ‘literacy’ rather than as for instance ‘graphic processing’ then it is these associations that are being called on (1997:50).

In the following section I will attempt to distil the “four Ms” as a way of plotting what I view as key challenges to the NLS emerging over the past decade. These four Ms give rise to a set of challenges or questions that are addressed in the various chapters of this thesis.

### Materiality

Up until the very late 1990s much NLS research tended to shy away from exploring the materiality of literacy. Preferring to focus on the social, a focus on the material may have led proponents of the NLS to feel that such analysis would provide evidence of literacy as a technology separable from the context in which it emerged, transportable to other contexts, potentially decontextualised. However, in 1997, one of the first pieces of research within the NLS focusing particularly on “physical characteristics of texts”, was undertaken at Lancaster by Ormerod and Ivanic (published in Barton et al, 2000), who were influenced by Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996) call to focus on the materiality of texts:

....literacy practices can be inferred not only from events but also from characteristics of the ‘text’ itself. By viewing a text not just as a form of visual and verbal representation, but also as a material object with distinct physical features, we can locate the meanings it is conveying within the

physical, technological and social practices associated with its construction and use (Ormerod and Ivanic, in Barton et al, 2000:91).

More recently Kress (2003) has defined his efforts in this area:

(My interests) lie in the materiality of the resources, and in how humans work with them in the demands of their lives. I am interested in this matter of material, of stuff, and how humans have worked with it and have worked it. I am aware that this partial focus needs to be complemented – matched – with the interests and the work of those who look much more and in great detail at practices. And the by now very extensive work in the area of literacy practices (and literacy events) needs to be complemented by work on the potentials and affordances of the stuff, the material which is involved in the practices. In my view practices can only be understood when the potentials and limitations of the tools with which one practices are understood. And the stuff is culturally remade precisely in those practices (p13).

Kress and Street (in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006) have recently written about how the two theories of NLS and multi-modality can complement each other while also specifying what focus multi-modality brings:

A social semiotic theory of multimodality is interested in sign-makers, sign-making and signs. In being interested in signs it is interested precisely in what signs 'are made of', the affordances, the materiality and the provenance of modes and sign in that mode (pviii).

And further:

NLS and multimodality are well placed to explore each other's strengths and weaknesses, to develop a conversation that facilitates new growth and more powerful tools (p ix).

### Multiliteracies/ multiple literacies/ literacy practices

This challenge emerged from the work undertaken by the New London Group known as "multiliteracies". The paper published in Harvard Education Review in 1996 touched on the questions of multimodality raised above but called for a pedagogy of multiliteracies in which students would need to become "literate" in different modes of communication like the visual, the gestural, audio, spatial and so on. This call gave rise to numerous responses. Street in particular, but also Street in debate with Kress (as indicated above) made a strong case for reserving

the use of the term literacy for the linguistic mode, in particular for written language.

Street had always put forward the argument for the idea of multiple literacies, from his original work in Iran where he had identified what he called *maktab* and commercial literacies. This influenced the work of the Lancaster group and a wide range of further researchers. From its origins in demarcating a domain of practice, like the buying and selling of fruit, or the Qur'anic school, or the state school for that matter, the term multiple literacies started to take on a more general and arbitrary descriptive use although still referring to the uses of written language – like official literacies, bureaucratic literacies, dominant literacies and so on. So it was not too far to extend from those uses of the term to uses such as emotional literacies, subversive literacies, political literacies and so on.

In my own work I had preferred to use the term literacy practices within particular domains to gain specificity. There were times when I judged that I had sufficient data to identify “a literacy” like “night-school literacy in Site 5”. But the difficulty for me always lay with the boundaries of the context within which one could identify such specificity – within one interactional setting one could perhaps identify innumerable different literacies going on. Without specifying the boundaries of the context whereby one specified ***the literacy*** the identification of the literacy could end up being an *a priori* judgement made by the researcher.

### Multimodality

Primarily originating in the social semiotic work of Kress (1985) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and building on Halliday's earlier understanding of language as social semiotic (1978), what first emerged as a challenge to the NLS and is now seen as complementing it, sought to situate the linguistic mode (spoken or written) alongside other semiotic modes of communication and thereby to expose or

explore the privileging of the linguistic (Kress 2003; Kress and Street, in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006).

Up until recently the theoretical frameworks influencing the NLS have been largely drawn from linguistics and linguistic anthropology. The challenge from multimodality is to broaden these in the search for frameworks applicable to all semiotic modes. Kress explains the shift from the linguistic to the semiotic. Analytically relativising the centrality of linguistic texts, Kress claims that text is but one moment in the ceaseless flow of semiosis. It is a moment of “fixing” of semiosis:

Semiosis is not restricted to a material realisation in language alone, nor is text a purely linguistic entity. We need to move to a position that treats social semiosis as prior, that sees text as always multimodal and that treats text as the focal formal unit of social-semiotic punctuation (Kress, in Meinhof and Smith, 2000:153).

I elaborate on this in the next chapter when I propose a focus on meaning making trajectories, which may draw on different communicative modes for their realisation, depending on the affordances of these modes in ***‘that place at that time’***.

### Models

In the above discussion Wilson was using the term autonomous to refer to “autonomous Literacy” rather than an “autonomous model of literacy”. She was drawing on earlier discussions around “dominant” or “official” literacies (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), but by drawing on the third space metaphor she was counterposing them as two opposing poles, rather than as two places on a continuum. This is an early version of the problem culminating in Brandt and Clinton’s argument (in 2002) where autonomous became characterised as “distant” and ideological as “local”.

So there is slippage between two usages of the terms autonomous and ideological. The idea of a model is an abstract, etic representation through which perspectives and views are 'modelled'. A further difficulty with this approach lies in the problem of reifying literacy; if 'a literacy' can be counter-posed with another (dominant versus local, for example; or official versus vernacular) these literacies may be seen as engaging in a process of struggle with one another. Such descriptions endow the literacies with a sense of agency which I believe is problematic. This approach links with the second problem discussed above, do we talk about multiple literacies or literacy practices? In Kell (2001a and 2001b) I worked with the idea of the "third space", but rather than describing it as a space in between different literacies (as Wilson does), I conceptualised the opposing dimensions as two domains of literacy practice in South Africa. Within those domains of literacy practice, struggles could occur, but these struggles were undertaken by **people** engaging in practice using the tools and technologies available **in that place at that time**. The challenge therefore is to strengthen and refine what is meant by 'models'. Descriptions and analysis of the autonomous model are necessary, but such descriptions should not reify distant or non-local literacies as autonomous of context.

The value of Street's model (autonomous/ideological) is that it throws into relief different ways of viewing what literacy is in society, what it does, what claims can be made for it and so on. Researchers working with a view of literacy as always and everywhere ideological can therefore make claims about power and social structure as played out through the uses and valuing of literacy. However, they need to demonstrate how "signs of communication are signs of social value in contexts of inequality" (Prinsloo, 2006:90). In order to demonstrate this connection a closer understanding of context is needed.



## Theorising context

Context is fore-grounded in NLS and is implied in each of the four challenges discussed above. Brandt and Clinton (2002: 340) claim that putting context at the centre of understandings about literacy is “the most critical reversal of the autonomous model...(In the NLS) Social context organises literacy rather than the other way around.”

In my view a focus on practice can provide the mediating link between text and social structure. This link has to be provided by the study of context. But the key question is: “Is context linked to but outside of (extrinsic to) language use in a specific social interaction or is context part and parcel of (intrinsic to) language use?” (Wetherell, 2001:389).

How do we understand what is meant by the term context? Always implied in the text/context relation is the relation between universals and particulars, and this cuts across disciplinary fields. However, the concept does have different usages within different disciplines and these have implications for theorising and studying the text/context relation. Dilley (2002) points out that the history of usage of the concept suggests a shift in reference of the term from the act of composing meaningful stretches of language either as speech or writing to the conditions for understanding a stretch of language and of the possibility of determining its meaning. From describing the act of conjoining, the term then comes to designate the conditions shaping that which has been conjoined.

In philosophy, the key argument animating this “social life of the concept” is the “unboundedness of context” (Culler, in Dilley, 2002:7) in which the attempt to be thorough in understanding context leads to a total contextualisation in which everything becomes the context of everything else”.

Up until the poststructuralist move, context continued to be equated with an objective description of everything that surrounded a focal event or set of utterances. This is akin to the figure-ground metaphor that has so often been used to highlight the key relation of context and meaning. In their review of work on context, primarily within linguistic anthropology, Duranti and Goodwin (1992) start off with untangling these two elements: a focal event and a field of action within which that event is embedded. Context is thus a frame that surrounds the event being examined and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation. However, it should by now be apparent that on closer inspection, context starts to be seen as an entirely unstable unit. I will outline some of the reasons for this and subsequent theoretical responses.

Duranti and Goodwin (1992) point out that in analysing context it is crucial to take the perspective of the participants whose behaviour is being analysed as the point of departure. Furthermore, participants' articulation of their environment is shaped by the activities of the moment, the context that is relevant to what they are doing changes radically when they move from one activity to another:

The dynamic mutability of context is complicated further by the ability of participants to rapidly invoke within the talk of the moment alternative contextual frames (ibid:5).

Briggs's (in Duranti and Goodwin, ibid: 16) identification of problems inherent in the concept of context echoes this and adds the related dilemmas of "inclusiveness" and "false objectivity". The problem of inclusiveness refers to the fact that there is no way to know when an adequate range of contextual factors has been encompassed. The problem of false objectivity emerges from the positivist character of most conceptualisations of context. This equation of context with an objective description of everything that surrounds a set of utterances has two important implications. First, since it is absolutely impossible to point to all

aspects of the context, the researcher becomes the judge of what merits inclusion. Second, positivistic definitions construe context as a set of discourse-external conditions that exist prior to and independent of the performance. This undermines the analyst's ability to discern how the participants themselves determine which aspects of the ongoing social interaction are relevant.

The phenomenological tradition identified by Lave (in Chaiklin and Lave 1996: 18-21) seems to shift the debate beyond the figure-ground relation and "focuses on the construction of the world in social interaction: this leads to the view that activity is its own context". While Lave draws on the discipline of psychology, the approach correlates with that of conversational analysis (CA). In order to avoid the problems of inclusiveness and false objectivity, Schegloff, a key theorist in the CA tradition, advocates the primacy of internal analysis: "You need to have technical analysis first, in order to constitute the very object to which critical and sociopolitical analysis might sensibly and fruitfully be applied. And then you may find it no longer in point" (quoted in Blommaert, 2001b:35).

Hymes (1972) presented an early and trenchant critique of premises and methods in CA. He outlined two key problems relating to the conversational analytical perspective on context. Firstly, the repeated disinterest in the "larger context" (where and when the exchanges being analysed took place) and a disregard for non-verbal and gestural aspects of face-to-face communication; secondly, a disregard for the interpretations that the participants themselves might provide of their own behaviour.

Relevant to this thesis is Blommaert's critique of CA (in Blommaert, 2005), in which he claims that interaction is equated with (single-instance) context; and that in this approach social structure (including power relations) is produced in single instances of interaction. Blommaert points out that there is an association between

'talk-in-interaction' – and the qualification of such instances of talk as 'an activity in its own right', an association that permits single instances of interaction to be taken as coterminous with relevant 'context'.

*From communicative competence in context to contextualisation cues*

As mentioned earlier, Hymes, with his call for a focus on meaning and use in language studies, strongly invoked the concepts of context and community. Such work "must take as context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code takes its place as but part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw" (Hornberger, 2003:249). The relation between form and function within a community depended on communicative competence of members of that community, enabling the mapping of form and function necessary for speech to 'fit' context. Studying language in this way "requires discovering a relevant frame or context, identifying the items which contrast within it, and determining the dimensions of contrast for the items within the set so defined" (ibid:250). Discovering the 'patterns' of given speech communities is emphasised, and the presupposition is made that cultural groups have relatively stable styles of speaking with sets of rules that stipulate which linguistic cues are appropriate in which contexts (Wortham, ibid:14).

Gumperz's work on contextualisation points the way from context as a notion of frame to a more dynamic conceptualisation. The basis for contextualisation lies in "co-occurrence expectations", which are "learned in the course of previous interactive experience and form part of our habitual and instinctive linguistic knowledge" (Gumperz, in Jaworski and Coupland, 1999:101). Contextualisation cues are "any aspect of the surface form of utterances which, when mapped onto message context can be shown to be functional in the signalling of interpretative frames" (ibid: 102).

With this more dynamic understanding of the ways in which contexts are created in interaction, the following comment by Wortham (reminiscent of the points made by Bauman and Briggs above) reminds us of the broader problems with relating the concept of communicative competence to context:

Competence theories fail because of the indeterminacy of relevant context. Other features of the context can always become salient, so as to transform the appropriacy of an utterance. Because the meaning of any utterance can be reconfigured by making different contextual features relevant, the analytical question becomes: how do certain contextual features become salient, such that an utterance comes to have identifiable interactional functions? Something more flexible than communicative competence mediates between the cues in an utterance and people's conscious or non-conscious construal of its meaning. (Wortham, in Wortham and Rymes, 2003:15)

Following on from this work on contextualisation, Wortham asks the question (ibid:9): How do linguistic signs come to have meaning in cultural and interactional context? He suggests that the answer seems to lie in what he calls the distinction between symbolic and indexical language use; symbolic has been more generally termed as the denotational part of linguistic meaning making. According to Wortham, the vast proportion of work in linguistics and the general public perceptions around language use are that it is largely symbolic. However on closer examination it turns out that much of this usage is actually indexical – where basically the sign is indexical if the object which it denotes is co-occurring. The meaning of the verbal signs always depends partially on how those signs presuppose aspects of the context as relevant. Decontextualised meanings compose part of what actual speech communicates, but context-dependent, indexical meanings are always essential to understanding an utterance (ibid:10).

Work on indexicality has recently been taken up quite widely, and the way in which Blommaert extends this work is highly relevant to my thesis, in particular, his research (Blommaert, 2001) on asylum-seekers' processes of applying for asylum in Belgium, and his analysis of written texts from Congo (Blommaert, 2005). In

Blommaert (2001c) various sequences in the process of applying for asylum are outlined. In the first stage, the asylum seeker is interviewed and a story about the need to escape the home country is recorded by an official. Blommaert analyses how this story is then taken to higher levels of the bureaucracy, being discussed and assessed with different groups of people (professional, authorities) who then write reports, recommendations etc until the status of the application is decided and the fate of the individual is sealed. Blommaert examines what he calls the “unequal linguistic resources” coming into play in this sequence of events. In 2005, he furthers this work by viewing the sign/context relation and the question of mobility across economies of signs and symbols as part of what he calls “orders of indexicality” (p73). By this he means that indexical meanings are ordered, they are not matters of random attribution but closely related to other social and cultural features of social groups. In addition, they occur “in the form of stratified complexes”, in which some forms are ranked higher than others (ibid:74).

There are, however, three difficulties in drawing on this rich body of work in relation to my research questions. The first is a question of the unit of analysis. Much work on indexicality draws on earlier work on deixis, focusing on the ways in which speakers use single words, like pronouns, to accomplish contextualising functions. Wortham’s work and a number of contributors to Wortham and Rymes (2003) explore features of stretches of speech, but focus on the functions of spoken words phrases or sentences in establishing meaning in these stretches. Related to this is the second problem, which is that little work on indexicality so far, apart from Blommaert’s, deals with written language or explicitly focuses on the relationship between spoken and written language. Blommaert’s data, in some of the studies of indexicality, includes completed written texts, like a letter, a history, rather than data from the interactional events in which those texts are designed

and produced. So in Wortham's work (in Wortham and Rymes, 2003), the data consists of speech (largely) without writing; in Blommaert's work the data consists of writing without speech (or in the case of other studies of his on indexicality, speech without writing). Once the unit of analysis becomes a combination of the modes of speech and writing, questions of context and community become ever more complex. Thirdly, in Blommaert's work, shifts across contexts are centrally placed. However, little of the other work discussed above, shows what the concept of indexicality achieves when these shifts occur across contexts as opposed to within contexts.

In the following chapters I focus on chunks of meaning making in which speech, writing and other communicative modalities are drawn on and consider the nature of the 'chunking of meaning making' as a unit of analysis. On the other hand, (unlike Blommaert's focus on global economies of signs and symbols) I will be focusing the lens more closely on micro contextual shifts, and attempting to understand these meaning making chunks within what might be called 'local' contexts. The concept of recontextualisation provides the main frame of reference, but I will return to indexicality in the final chapter.

In addition to Blommaert's work, two other studies sparked off the questions addressed in this thesis. The first was Mehan's paper (in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996) 'The Construction of a Learning Disabled Student: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation'. Mehan shows how a teacher's initial interaction with a child leads to a sequence of events in which the child's identity is progressively recontextualised (this is my choice of term) through the play of texts and words in each of the events leading from the observation, to testing, to a report, to a set of minutes and finally to a label. Each of these events, involving forms of entextualisation, therefore, was subsequently recontextualised (these are not

Mehan's terms, but mine). Through each recontextualising event the 'meaning making process' gained durability and institutional 'weight' through the involvement of different groups of people and the texts they produced.

The second was Iedema's work on resemiotisation (1999; 2001) which takes a further step in examining how the shift of meanings across contexts draws on different codes and semiotic modes. He shows how this happens in the chain of events that led to the redesign and rebuilding of a hospital, from the initial verbal discussions, through to the minutes of these meetings, to the architects' plans and finally to the durable structure – the building itself. Central to Iedema's project, and with reference to Actor Network Theory, is the idea that facts are achieved through their transposition into "successively more durable semiotics" – like printed matter, architectural design and even buildings.

Iedema links his work on resemiotisation with the concept of recontextualisation and it is to this concept that I now turn.

### **Recontextualisation**

Bauman and Briggs, in 1990, completed a review of work in this area, but considered it in relation to the concepts of entextualisation and decontextualisation. These writers point out that a starting point for inquiry in relation to these concepts is a distinction between text and discourse:

Entextualisation is the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting (p61).

The text resulting from this process may still carry elements of its history of use within it. They suggest that the task is to "discover empirically what means are available in a given social setting, to whom they may be available, under what circumstances for making discourse into text" (ibid:65). They further argue that:



processes that anchor discourses in contexts of use may be opposed by others that potentiate its detachability. Decontextualisation from one social context involves recontextualisation in another, and this is a transformational process. We must therefore determine what the recontextualised text brings with it from its earlier context(s) and what emergent form, function and meaning it is given as it is recentered (p67).

They suggest that to decontextualise and recontextualise a text is an act of control, and in regard to the differential exercise of such control the issue of social power arises<sup>5</sup>. Social power can be described as involving the following dimensions all of which are deeply implicated in the construction and assumption of authority:

- Access: institutional structures; social definitions of eligibility and other mechanisms and standards of inclusion and exclusion
- Legitimacy: being accorded the authority to appropriate a text such that your recentering of it counts as legitimate; may also involve mechanisms such as ordination; apprenticeship, cultural property rights and so on
- Competence: this can be seen as innate human capacity, learned skill; special gift, a correlate of one's position in the life cycle and so on
- Values: texts may be valued because of what you can use them for; what you can get for them; or for their indexical reference to desired states or qualities (adapted from Bauman and Briggs, 1990:77).

A further review of the concept is provided in Text (1998, Vol. 18, No. 2), in particular the introduction by Linell and the epilogue by Sarangi. The focus of this issue is on recontextualisation in professional discourse studies, however, and once again the main focus is on spoken language. Linell points out that contexts are only partially shared amongst communicators and recontextualisation is not equally transparent to all parties. With particular reference to the professions, Linell points out that much communication has been processed through what he calls "long intertextual chains" (1998:146). Professionals must accommodate their expertise, knowledge and messages to meet the needs and expectations of people with other interests and backgrounds. But these professionals also play important gate-keeping roles, and can select, endorse or re-perspectivise. At the

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of decontextualisation is also fraught with van Oers (1998), for example, writing an article called "The Fallacy of Decontextualisation".

same time, he claims that recontextualisation is never a pure transfer of a fixed meaning:

In no case are we faced with a true transfer of something; it is never the propagation of a fixed message across representational instances. Rather it is a complex transformation, involving shifts of meaning and new perspectives.... What is being exchanged is not only words and discourses, but the worlds that make discourses (ibid:147).

### **Recontextualisation and resources**

The consideration of recontextualisation is taken up by Blommaert (2001a; 2001b and 2005) who extends the dimensions discussed in the previous section, in particular that of *access* through a focus on inequality and a consideration of the implications of the movement of texts across contexts. Blommaert does not highlight the concept of recontextualisation, but rather re-entextualisation, and sees “translocal” contexts as “forgotten contexts to texts”.

...it becomes apparent that not every context is accessible to everyone , re-entextualisation practices depend on who has access to which contextual space . Access here also depends on resources: re-entextualisation often involves a technology of contextualisation, a degree of expertise that is very exclusive and the object of tremendous inequality in society (2001b:42).

A further “forgotten context” is seen by Blommaert as “resources” – the complex of linguistic means and communicative skills, like codes, varieties and styles. He claims that these can be seen as contexts because they are distributed unequally globally and this unequal distribution shapes local contexts (2005:58). He argues that the shifting of discourse across contexts cannot be accommodated by the frameworks of CA and that knowledge of this shifting:

...is derived from ethnography – an awareness that discourse is contextualised in each phase of its existence, and that every act of discourse production, reproduction and consumption involves shifts in contexts (2001:44).

Blommaert sees it as remarkable that:

...whenever we say that text is situated in discourse analytical terms , we seem to refer to forms of locality: the unique, one-time and micro-situatedness of text. From this individual situatedness, larger structures, patterns or rules can then be deduced, but these generalisations do not involve higher-level situatedness: discourse seems to lose context as soon as it is raised above the single-text level. This different degree of situatedness – large, general, supra-individual, typical, structural – should have a place in any study of discourse (2005:67).

This point brings the discussion back to literacy, and to a key concern in this thesis, the relation between literacy events and literacy practices. The concept of event refers to “locality, to individual situatedness”; and (using Blommaert’s terms) “larger patterns or rules can then be deduced”, but in this process of deduction they lose context.

Reder and Darvila, with reference to the arguments put forward by Brandt and Clinton (discussed in Chapter One), argue that:

...these concepts provide an analytical space for understanding the relationship between the local and the distant, but without further development these concepts do not yet constitute a coherent framework for understanding this relationship....If we concede that literacy is not an autonomous entity, then what is the nature of literacy within the broader sociocultural context?...The concepts of literacy events and literacy practices provide an answer as to where the local and the distant collide (in many everyday literacy events) but they fail to provide an answer as to how this interaction occurs (2005:176) .

These authors draw attention to Street’s (2003) discussion of literacy practices as hybrids:

The result of local-global encounters around literacy is always a new hybrid rather than a single essentialised version of either. It is these hybrid literacy practices that NLS focuses upon rather than either romanticising the local or conceding the dominant privileging of the supposed “global” (2003b:4).

The point that Reder and Darvila (2005:176) make here is that “‘local’ literacies draw on perspectives that participants have developed through participation in other literacy practices (like those of schooling, work, religion and so on)”; likewise “‘global’ literacy does not exist in an essentialised pure form, but only emerges as

one piece of hybrid literacy practices that are always necessarily locally constituted”.

Sociolinguistic research undertaken in the Bakhtinian tradition, and on reported speech, recounts and so on (for example, Maybin, 1999 and 2003) has added valuable insights to our understandings of hybridity. Linell (1998:149) points out that recontextualisation can be studied as intertextual chains or as the multivoiced mix within single texts. These traditions although dealing explicitly with speech genres and texts, do not focus specifically on written language. In what follows I focus on the idea of chaining (not as intertextual chains but as meaning making sequences) rather than the “multivoiced mix”.

### **The “Four Resources Model” of literacy practice**

If resources can be seen as contexts as suggested by Blommaert (above) what is meant by the term “**resources**” with regard to written language? I have drawn on what has come to be known as the “four resources model” in literacy studies (Kell, 2000; 2003), developed originally by Luke and Freebody (1990) amongst others. This model proposed four **roles** that readers needed to adopt and perform in order to deal with written texts. In Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997) however, these are called **domains**. The roles/domains are:

- **Code-breaker:** Successfully literate students are successfully able to crack the code of written texts (Freebody and Luke 2003:56), including alphabetic literacy, recognising sounds in words, spelling, page layout, text directionality and so on.
- **Text participant:** Participating in the meanings of text involves the general knowledge and textual resources required for making sense of a text.
- **Text user:** Being able to use texts functionally means understanding ‘what this text is for, here and now’, and what are culturally and socially acceptable uses of texts in a given context or literacy event.
- **Text analyst:** Critically analysing and transforming texts involves being able to interrogate and critique texts in order to identify the manner in which texts ‘represent particular points of view while silencing others’ (Luke and Freebody, 1999:5).

Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997:40) ask questions about whether learning in relation to any of these roles/domains can be left to incidental, indirect or implicit processes. They also ask whether there is some natural or inevitable developmental progression to them, such that they can be left to instruction in later school years.

In an earlier piece Luke (1992) outlined these broad areas as “resources” which people draw on – code-breaking, pragmatic, semantic and critical. I have tried to work with the idea of resources/roles and address the above two questions in contexts outside of schooling (Kell, 2000; 2003; 2006) exploring the idea that people participate in textually mediated practices, drawing partially on these resources according to context, but also drawing on others whom they view as having greater competence in the use of such resources. In doing so, I have attempted to show that achievements involving literacy can be seen as distributed across social groups, rather than vested only in individuals. In many cases this distributed nature may be a result of the historical shaping of unequal access to the resources. In conceptualising the dimensions of unequal access, Luke and Freebody’s (1999) statement that literacy capabilities involve firstly the **breadth** of an individual’s or a community’s repertoire of literate practices; Secondly, the **depth and degree of control** exercised by an individual or community in any given literacy activity; and thirdly, the **extent of hybridity, novelty and redesign** at work, is useful. In a context like South Africa, characterised by deep and entrenched inequality, especially with regard to access to schooling, these three dimensions are especially relevant. I will return to these in the final chapter.

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) recently raise some questions about this model. One question of interest here is the fact that “the roles put texts rather than practices in the saddle” (ibid: 8), and asks how the emphasis on text addresses

questions of multimodality. They then suggest four different roles: These are: being a designer of texts; a text mediator or broker; a text *bricoleur* or a text *jammer*<sup>6</sup>. This shift, they claim, addresses both the challenge of multimodality and the challenge provided by changes in social practices associated with technological change (ibid:9). They firmly state that this conception of roles that are related to texts is not a conception of roles that are *internal* to texts in the way the four reader/writer roles are. The latter are roles conceived in terms of being able to deal with texts as the focal point of the exercise, the four roles tell us nothing about their readers or writers as social practitioners. All we know about them is what they can do *with* texts. They claim that their conception of roles turns this upside down: "... our roles are not of texts, although they are inseparably linked to producing, distributing and exchanging texts"(ibid:10).

Despite the value of this argument, I will argue in this thesis that it is not possible to collapse dealing with text and engaging with practice into one concept. I aim to show that dealing with text has to involve social, cognitive, technological and artifactual resources which are not isomorphic with the practices within which they are embedded<sup>7</sup>.

Kress draws on a much-expanded understanding of text that does not limit it to print-based modalities:

One of the crucial points here is that language is one realisational means of semiosis amongst many. If text is a punctuation of semiosis ...then the

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<sup>6</sup> Lankshear and Knobel argue that these roles are derived from an analysis of reading and writing in 'new times', that demands special new capacities and knowledges, that these are not yet settled as new technologies and associated practices are still very fluid. I believe, in fact, that the roles they suggest are quite appropriate for the contexts which I studied, the 'black' townships around Cape Town, and I will return to this point in relation to social theory in the final chapter. In addition these roles have some familiarity with aspects of the Social Uses of Literacy research (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996), in fact the term "bricoleur" was used in that research, and applied to members of a remote rural community with minimal schooling, but who were creative in their interactions with NGOs and state groups in their struggles over land. This may suggest that the rather ordered roles outlined by Luke and Freebody, belong to an era that was limited in time, one in which literacy was closely linked with modernity.

<sup>7</sup> As will be seen in later chapters, resources take shape in relation to the cognitive capacities of individuals and between individuals in groups. They can thus be distributed. To take the way in which Goffman's concept of participation frameworks has been used in the study of conversational interactions – each person in Goffman's sense plays a 'role', but because the resources of spoken language to a greater degree are isomorphic with the event in which they are produced and used, the "capacities" involved are thus seen less as resources and more as, inseparably, part of the roles.

various semiotic modes are different means of fixing semiosis. In a period when texts are in any case becoming increasingly and more insistently multimodal – that is, realised in several different semiotic modes – it is becoming essential to pay attention not only to the forms of semiosis (its punctuations) but also to its realisational means (its ‘fixing’)(in Meinhof and Smith, 2000:141).

For Kress, it would become necessary to ask two fundamental questions in any study of communication. The first question is: “In what mode do semiotic processes get realised or fixed”; the second is: “What are the punctuations of the process of semiosis (ibid: 152)?” Kress argues that the first is a question about conventions of cultural uses of semiotic modes, and to existing specialisations, as well as to historically changing uses and specialisations. The second is a question about individuals and their cognitive and affective work set in the context of social practices and their structures and regularities:

The two issues of semiotic mode of realization and kinds of punctuation together set parameters to the semiotic resources available to individuals and to that culture (ibid: 153).

It is this combination of two key questions that Kress and Street claim has brought the fields of multimodality and NLS together (in Pahl and Rowsell, 2006).

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) present their idea of “designers of texts” as relating to Kress’s discussion of how the representational practices offered by engagement with ICTs have led to communication as display rather than as syntactically structured sequence. However, I will differ with both Kress and Lankshear and Knobel that this is something new, or of the “now”, as presented in the following quote.

Making a representation *now goes well beyond simple encoding*. It has become a matter of active, deliberate design, and meaning making becomes a matter of the individual’s active shaping and reshaping of the resources that she or he has available, in the wish to make the representations match intentions as closely as possible (Kress et al, 2001:2 my emphasis -CK).

Instead, I will argue in this thesis that “design” of communication can be a valid description for processes across semiotic modes, including spoken and written language, and that processes of designing simple communicative events occur in contexts which are not characterised by an abundance of new technologies or sophisticated literacy artifacts.

### **Design work and the shaping of intentions**

In Barton et al (2000) Gee states that over the past few years he has wanted to move the idea of work to the centre of the NLS, and in particular a type of work to which language is important (in tandem with deeds, interactions, other sorts of symbols, and ways of thinking and valuing). He claims that:

Situations (contexts) do not just exist. Situations are rarely static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment by moment through ongoing work. It is the nature of this work that should, I argue, become crucial to the NLS. This type of work I will call enactive and recognition work (ibid:190).

In this thesis I focus on the ways in which work as textually-mediated social practice can be brought to the fore. ‘Work’ here is meaning making processes organised for the purpose of development, through sequences of activities taking place as events. Following from Kress, meaning making or semiosis can occur in a range of communicative modes and their combinations; most, but not all, of the processes that I focus on here involve reading or writing. But meaning making is not confined to one event at one time or place although it may often have been studied (and continues to be studied) in that way. Meaning making is temporarily fixed in events but if it is conceptualised as a “ceaseless flow of semiosis” (Kress, in Meinhof and Smith, 2000), in order to understand meaning making as purposeful material activity, it is necessary to study it as it shifts across time and space. Social practice is activity but unless the social and the observable event is identified and specified, claims for practices cannot be sustained. The aim



therefore is to explain aspects of the semiotic through the illumination of the interaction between the semiotic and the social which is thrown into relief as this 'crossing' occurs.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) provide a useful framework for thinking about communicative actions across modes, outlining what they call four strata of communicative practice: Discourse, design, production and distribution.

- Discourse

The writers argue that communicative practices always involve both representation and interaction. Communicative activities have to be linked to some form of representational content. They conceive of representational content also in terms of social practice and have defined discourse as knowledge which is (1) a knowledge of practices, of how things are or must be done together with specific evaluations and legitimations of and purposes for these practices, and (2) a knowledge which is linked to and activated in the context of specific communicative practices (ibid:114). With regard to the description of discourse, the bringing together of discourse as knowledge of practices in general, as well as being tied to those practices ***in that place at that time*** is valuable and will be referred to throughout this thesis.

- Design

Design contextualises, makes it work within the context of a communicative interaction by creatively or otherwise, drawing on semiotic resources such as generic schemas for stories, advertisements etc and it selects which modes will be used to realise which aspects of that communicative interaction (ibid:119). Design thus inserts a discourse into a communicative interaction.

- Production

This refers to the organisation of the expression, to the actual material articulation of the semiotic event or the actual material production of the semiotic artefact. The medium of expression becomes relevant here.

I argue that in grasping the relation between design and production, the issue of timing needs to be taken into account. The amount of time that elapses in between design and production is an important consideration. If, as the authors themselves suggest, design and production can be instantaneous, does the split second in between a person recognising a communicative act and responding, say, with the lifting of an eyebrow, count as a necessary separation between design and production? I think an argument can be made for this interpretation in Kress and Van Leeuwen's terms. The gestural mode in this case is chosen above the spoken linguistic (for example, the participant could have chosen to express scepticism through questioning, commenting or joking). The raised eyebrow inserts an evaluation into an interaction. But the gesture is both designed and produced instantaneously. To limit the relation between design and production to those processes separated by extended periods of time and which may draw on specialisations in the division of labour for their accomplishment (as in say, the design of a building by an architect and its physical production by a builder) seems to constrain the usefulness of the model.

- Distribution

Distribution adds a further layer to expression, particularly evidenced in the use of new technologies that add new dimensions of expression. Distribution can involve recording, transmitting, transcribing.

Kress and Van Leeuwen's description of this stratum is very limited in my view, and does not seem to capture the dynamic view of communication in much of Kress's work. The description seems to imply a "re-inscription" of an already

existing inscription, so for example a Beethoven symphony is produced in a concert hall by the musicians, and this production is distributed, first by analogue in the form of an audio recording and later in time in the form of a digital recording. Each of these technologies of re-inscription has certain affordances. But can the term “distribution” be used to capture the process that Rampton (2000) calls “projection across”? For example, a shout of warning projected across a valley involves design, production and distribution instantaneously, with no re-inscription; a writing of the same warning and the transportation of the text thus produced across the valley suggests that the warning may first be spoken and then written before it is transported. The concept of projection becomes an important issue for exploration in this thesis.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) are adamant that these strata apply to both articulation and reception/interpretation, and claim that:

Indeed we define communication as only having taken place when there has been both articulation and interpretation. Which discourses interpreters or users may bring to bear on a semiotic product or event has everything to do, in turn, with *their place in the social and cultural world, and also with the content*. The degree to which intention and interpretation will match depends on context (ibid:8 my emphasis)<sup>8</sup>.

### **Meaning making, communicative events and social structure**

Many of the writers discussed above have been drawing rather implicitly on the concept of ‘realisation’ to explore the accomplishment of communication in different modes. The ability to realise communication is dependent on many factors as indicated in much of the work discussed above. Yet there seems to me to be a gap in exactly the area that Kress and Van Leeuwen allude to above: how do communicators know their place in the social and cultural world, and how do they know the content if their ability to communicate depends on knowledge and

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<sup>8</sup> Bernstein’s exploration of what he calls “recognition and realisation” rules seems very relevant here and I believe this would be a fruitful area for further research, but cannot be dealt with in this thesis.

insight into their social and cultural place? And if the matching referred to above depends on context, how exactly do we, as analysts, find a way of studying how they know their place in the social and cultural world<sup>9</sup>?

It has been pointed out that the conversational analytic tradition struggles to bridge from detailed analysis of conversation to an account of social structure (Blommaert, 2001b and 2005). Furthermore, although the tradition of critical discourse analysis claims to do this, it has also been pointed out by Blommaert that much of what is claimed to be revealed by research methods, with closer scrutiny, amounts to *a priori* claims about social structure. In the tradition of linguistic anthropology, promising work explores these connections through the concept of indexicality and meta-discourse (Hanks, 1990; Wortham and Rymes, 2004). In the New Literacy Studies the gap between the analysis of literacy events and an account of social structure is, according to Street (2000; 2003a; 2003b) addressed through the concept of literacy practices and perhaps the concept of the interplay of different literacies. But as I have indicated in Chapter One with reference to my own work, further theoretical development and refinement is needed in order to avoid the making of *a priori* claims about social structure.

A further problem emerges with the emphasis in most of these traditions on data from single-instances, accompanied by the call, articulated by many writers, for methods to be developed to study multiple instances, traversals and crossings (Luke, in Alvermann, 2000; Blommaert, 2005; Lemke, 2000). I have tried above to point out the problems I identified with 'single instance context' in my earlier work, and pointed out that it was in the analysis of the space 'between the instances', as it were, that power relations were thrown into relief and aspects of social structure were revealed. That space enabled participants to take on (or not take on) new

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<sup>9</sup> This is an important question underlying much of the focus of this thesis, it has remained a relatively tacit question, however, and will need to be taken up in further work.

identities and positions as they moved from context to context, literally across space and time. In what follows I will focus more on the units of analysis necessary for studying the movement of meanings across contexts, and less on questions of how power and social structure are revealed by such study<sup>10</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical roots of my research partially answering my first research question: How does the view of literacy as situated social practice account for the movement of meanings across contexts? The origins of the New Literacy Studies, which provided a powerful frame for the view of literacy as situated social practice, were outlined; as well as a set of challenges to this frame. The challenges pose certain dilemmas with regard to viewing literacy as one amongst many semiotic modes.

The relation between the concepts of literacy practices and literacy events has been discussed, and Street's reminder (2003a and 2003b) that the question about how we characterise the shift from observing literacy events to conceptualising literacy practices can provide both a methodological and empirical way of dealing with the thorny issue of the role of literacy and the local and the global. In extending our ways of thinking about this relation I have outlined an area of scholarship drawing on sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology in order to explore the notion of context and of recontextualisation. I have suggested that there is work which studies recontextualisation as the "multivoiced mix" of texts and that the concept of hybridity is important in the study of literacy practices. However, recontextualisation can also be studied as processes of sequential chaining, in which meanings are carried (or not carried) across space and time

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<sup>10</sup> In Kell (2006) I attempted to address the way in which power and social structure are revealed in the study of crossings through the use of Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing which he links very productively with the idea of recognition and realisation rules.

according to the intentions and resources of those undertaking the communication. It is the later that is focused on in this thesis. I have linked the object of study, ***recontextualisation***, with an awareness of linguistic inequality as a crucial factor regulating the movement of meanings across contexts, drawing on Blommaert (2001a, 2003, 2005), and the following chapters explore this theme.

## Chapter Three. Methodological approach and theoretical framework

*One of the most interesting theoretical and methodological problems in case-based qualitative research, and indeed in discourse analysis, is the boundaries of, in ethnographic terms, “context”, or in Foucault’s terms, the “local”, of what counts as a case. And a key implication of the compression of time and space, of the emergence of continuous, globalised flows of discourse, bodies, and material, is the blurring of the local, of the situated, of the case, of the community.... So the ways in which we translate the old anthropological and structural functionalist versions of context into virtual, globalised, hybrid notions of space is a question worth pursuing further.*  
(Luke, in Alvermann, 2000:189)

### Introduction

The origins of this thesis lay in a particular “meaning making flow” presented in the diagram at the beginning of Chapter One. The approach to ethnography taken in that research did not provide me with the means to analyse what was happening as meaning making shifted contexts, and I struggled to bridge from the detailed events to broader questions of social practice. In the research site which provides the data for this thesis I was again faced with similar problems. As I drew together the ethnographic data collected, I was struck by how often this data showed processes that moved in and out of the physical site.

In my research on literacy practices in Site 5 (1994; 1996) analysis of literacy practices was premised on the identification of the dominant discourses in this community and their interplay. The way I approached this identification was two – fold; through extended participant observation in a wide range of contexts and interviews I identified broad discourses in the community; and at the same time I was able to explain the ways in which the production of speech and writing was enabled or constrained by these discourses, in turn reproducing, challenging or hybridising them. I saw this as enabling an explanation of the ways in which identity was constructed and maintained, but also at times, conflicted and

fractured. In the development context of Site 5, meaning and interaction were carried within different discourses, which were dominant in each of the three development institutions. The construction of participants' subjectivity within (and their access to) those discourses (and to corresponding modes of realisation) enabled or constrained their participation. Their literacy practices indexed these 'enablements' or constraints on participation, and needed to be viewed historically and spatially. This was evidenced particularly in the case study of Winnie Tsotso (Kell 1994; 1996; 2003), which influenced later studies (Lankshear, 2000; Papen, in Street, 2001). This approach to literacy and discourse was adopted quite widely in the studies undertaken as part of the Social Uses of Literacy project in South Africa (SoUL).

However, during the research and on subsequent reflection, I felt that there were some lacunae in this approach and I will now try to specify these. One of the innovations in the Site 5 research was the development of a method I called "slices through the life history of development items". Basically I traced three items which were raised in the meetings of the different development groups, and tracked how the treatment of these items varied across the different groups and their meetings. The items were: erecting a fence around the primary school; finding an office for the civic association and the setting up of a marketplace.

This method enabled me to produce descriptions of **processes**. I felt keenly that I was describing literacy events and by drawing on my understanding of social structure in the community at the time I was able to relate these events to social structure. However, I constantly questioned whether my treatment of this relation was descriptive rather than analytical, and this problem emerged because I was not able to find a language of description for addressing the relation between literacy events and literacy practices. I felt that ultimately I was describing literacy



events and relating them to social structure in rather grand leaps. To recap the description outlined in Chapter Two: If social structure defines what is possible, social events constitute what is actual, and practices mediate the two; I felt that I didn't know how to identify practices and that therefore I couldn't analyse how they mediated between the events I was seeing and the social structure that I had some idea about. A second problem I experienced with this method was the fact that I was conducting an ethnography of a "bounded" community, Site 5. While observing these slices through the life history of the development items, there were times when, in order to carry the processes forward, events took place physically outside of Site 5, and I did not observe these.

Drawing from the theoretical antecedents presented in the Chapter Two, the identification of the 4Ms as challenges facing and being addressed within the NLS, and summarising the difficulties I was facing using a traditional ethnographic approach to the study of literacy practices, I identified the following problems:

Firstly, ***flow (or sequences of events) versus single instance event***. Although in both research projects I was doing ethnography in a bounded site, what I was focusing on was ***meaning making flows*** and these constantly pushed at and pushed through the boundaries of my frame of reference at the level of analysis at which I was working (i.e. events and practices).

Secondly, ***delimiting context and the subsequent difficulties of making inferences about practices***. In earlier research I faced the problem of 'infinite regress' when it came to defining what counted as context. Each time I tried to delineate the relation between the literacy event and the broader context in order to pin down the notion of practice, I was faced with the question of boundaries.

Thirdly, ***shifting from linguistics to multi-modality***. I found that I needed to shift outwards from a linguistic frame of analysis to embrace multimodal forms of communication, and the idea of mode-switching or resemiotisation (ledema, 2001) became important.

Fourthly, I questioned whether the inferences that I was making about practices gave me ***an acceptable warrant for making claims about literacy, power and social structure***. This takes the problem identified in the second point above one step further and considers how the analytical moves between event, practice, discourse and structure are made. I

struggled with what has appeared to me to be a kind of 'voluntarism' implied in the way I was working with the concept of 'practice' and its implications of regularity and choice. From what I was observing and starting to analyse it seemed that each time a person took part in an event by drawing on the practices available to them, their participation was both enabled and constrained through their own personal histories and their communities' histories of differential access to these practices, differential legitimacy of the practices, differential competence in the practices and differential valuing attaching to these (Bauman and Briggs 1990:76).

I grapple with these problems in this chapter and in the thesis. I first outline the research site in which I embarked on ethnographic work, and the prior theory that informed the ethnographic approach. I then discuss my approach to the collection of data and the early stages of analysis of this data. Both the processes of collection and of analysis, which were iterative and non-linear, were part of my developing stance towards ethnography which I outline below. This changing stance arose from the frustration I had experienced with trying to generalise from the case study material developed as part of the Social Uses of literacy project (SoUL) and from trying to bring ethnographic material into an engagement with policy development (Kell, 1996a, 2003; Prinsloo and Kell, 1998). In the current work I take a different angle involving a commitment to theoretical development and refinement of the concepts used in the study of literacy in social practice. I therefore move towards what has been called analytical ethnography, and the work reported on here has much in common with what Burawoy (1998, 2000) terms the extended case method. I have been inspired by Burawoy's presentation on what he calls "reflexive science" as part of which he claims that:

...objectivity is not measured by procedures that assure an accurate mapping of the world but by the growth of knowledge; that is, the imaginative and parsimonious reconstruction of theory to accommodate anomalies (1998:28).

In the previous chapter I outlined constraints in the current theoretical tools available in the New Literacy Studies. In this chapter and the ones to come I will attempt to extend these tools to address some of the above problems.

## **The research site**

In setting up the funded project from which the data for Chapters Four, Five Six and Seven is drawn, I researched numerous different sites as possibilities for the mixed ethnographic-intervention hybrid approach that I was taking and that has been an important part of the 'stance' I wish to describe. The key criteria for the choice of site were that there needed to be a group or groups of people undertaking some form of stated collective organised action, which involved some literacy practices. The groups needed to have formed already and have some experience of working together and they needed to be in the process of embarking on this action, or already engaged in it. I assumed that house-building was one of the most appropriate forms of action for my study as it involved numerous forms of 'paperwork' combined with different modes of communication (the linguistic, bodily, visual and spatial) and the actual physical and material building process. During 1997 and 1998 I did, however, explore about four other sites where people were building houses within different organisational structures, as well as a possible production related site (a small factory) and a government project where people were working in teams to remove alien vegetation in an initiative called Working for Water. I had always intended to conduct the project in two sites, as I wished to have comparative data. It was extremely difficult to find a site which met the criteria I had established and once I committed myself to working in Khayaletu it became almost impossible to find time to search out a further site, let alone conduct research and intervention within it.

The eventual site of study chosen was a participatory development initiative in which 240 families, who were living in backyard shacks on the outskirts of Cape Town's black townships, came together in local savings clubs and accessed a government subsidy aimed at supporting "the poorest of the poor" in order to build brick houses on their own sites. This subsidy was delivered as part of what is

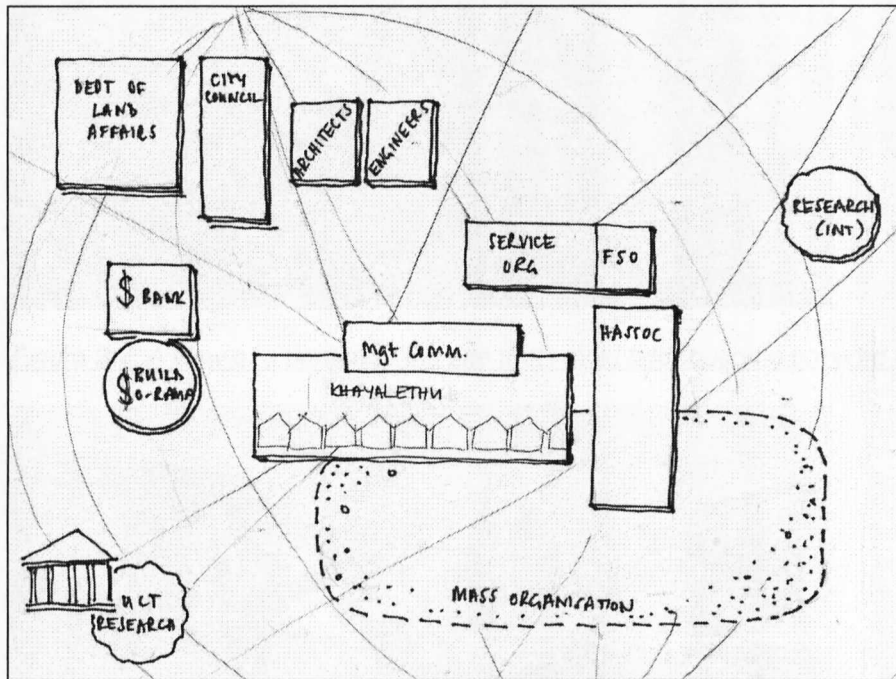
called “The People’s Housing Process (PHP)”. By contributing their own labour and some of the building materials and taking charge of the process, these groups aimed to save money that would otherwise have gone into the pockets of the housing developers. I have called the project Khayaletu, and the two clubs are KH1 and KH2. The activity at Khayaletu occurred within a wider organisational context of a housing association (HASSOC) and the support of a service organisation (SO) and a financial support organisation (FSO)<sup>11</sup>. These aimed at building grassroots social movements and connecting with other such groups internationally.

The clubs, the service organisations, and the national association initiated and took part in interactions with architects, engineers, City Council officials, as well as the national Housing Board and the Department of Land Affairs. Members at Khayaletu circulated between the building site itself, the banks and building supply shops. The following conceptual diagram captures some of the complexities of the organisational milieu, in an attempt to convey graphically the layers of interests and the levels at which these operated, from the most grassroots local level of building concrete slabs and putting windows into walls to the most removed international arena where debates about social movements occur in refined academic journals and conference circuits. I myself have carried aspects of the project with me from the gritty times of operating concrete mixers and intervening in record-keeping processes across a number of years and countries to a range of discursive situations characterised by fairly abstruse academic debate. Since the project was conducted as an ethnography it has at times felt exceedingly difficult, in amongst an overwhelming welter of semiotic

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<sup>11</sup> HASSOC (not the real name) was a national housing association bringing together numerous different groups in their struggles around savings and for housing. It was serviced by an NGO which I have called the SO (service organisation). The service organization employed full time staff members to co-ordinate this work. Also associated was a financial service organisation (FSO) which organised bridging funds while the highly bureaucratic processes of applying for subsidies was going on.

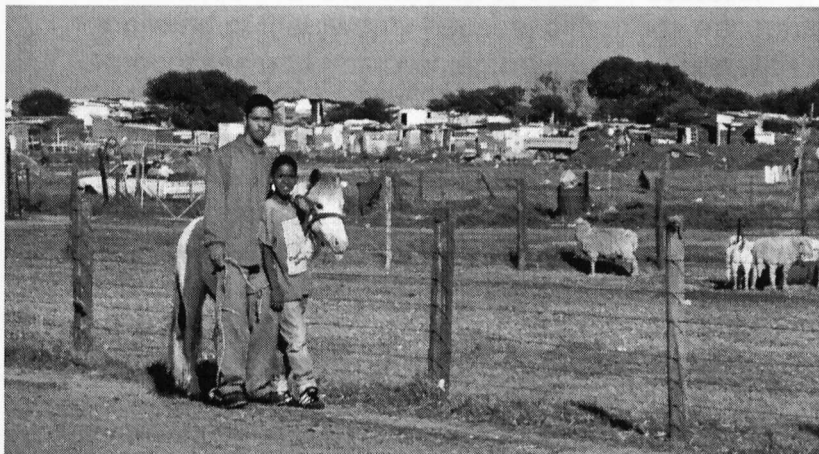
processes and very material actions to identify appropriate units of analysis. In many ways what lies at the core of this thesis is the search for a method of studying semiotic activity in general and the way in which it traverses contexts and switches modes in particular, and an exploration of the units of analysis needed for such study.



*Figure 3.1: Khayaletu's location*

At the time I entered Khayaletu in 1998, the two savings clubs which made up the organisational structure for Khayaletu had been in existence for about two and a half years. They had been in contact with the wider range of organisations discussed above and land for their development had been identified and purchased using bridging finance, which would be repaid from the government subsidy. A constitution had been drawn up and a management committee elected. Regular meetings were starting to be held in an old garage on the farmland – which was soon to disappear under the roads, slabs, trenches and sewers that slowly and tentatively came into existence. Next to the busy highway linking the area to the centre of Cape Town and under the power-lines marking the edges of the site, sheep continued to graze and be slaughtered and live chickens and

chicken feet were for sale along the road and in the old shed that continued to stand in the early period of the project. In “development-speak”, Khayaletu was a “greenfields” site, this means that there were no already existing houses on site.



*Figure 3.2: A view of a portion of the site that would later become covered with streets and houses.*



*Figure 3.3: Houses (but not yet streets) start to take over the fields*

I withdrew from the project during 2001 as it started to feel unsafe to move in and out of the area (there had been a number of violent incidents and car-hijackings in the area) but through to around 2005 I was told that houses had continued to be built on site. I moved away from Cape Town at the end of 2001. The problems of building at Khayaletu need to be seen against the backdrop of increasing pressure from the poor for housing and services, and the difficulties the young democracy in South Africa faces in addressing these pressures.



I have divided up the history of the Khayaletu project during the period of my own field work into three phases. These are:

- Phase One: Khayaletu - starting out; establishment of leadership structures with the support of the SO; establishing bases for participation; building of first twenty houses; difficulties encountered in managing the processes and establishing my own position with regard to intervention/research. This period stretched from between April 1998 to about August 1999
- Phase Two: Period of entrenchment of leadership; building of next forty houses; consolidation of difficulties in managing processes; bureaucratisation of participatory processes; allegations of financial corruption and so on. This period stretched from around August 1999 to July 2000
- Phase Three: The eventual ousting of the leadership; the vacuum that emerged; building slowing down to a trickle; the emergence of new leadership and a renewed emphasis on participation and accountability. This period stretched from around July 2000 until the period when I left the site, in mid-2001.



*Figure 3.4: Building taking place during Phase Two*

For the duration of the project I collected ethnographic data and undertook (or attempted to undertake) a range of interventions within the site, as proposed in the original funding application. These then became the focus of further forms of ethnographic data collection and fed into or influenced events on site. Although these interventions are not the focus of this thesis, they did have effects that are discernable in most of the following chapters.

Access was organised for me by a field worker of the service organisation, which was involved in setting up Khayaalethu and other such groups. I entered the project both as a researcher and as someone who aimed to 'provide' a literacy-related 'service' of some kind. This service, however, was not yet defined since the design of the funded project was to first conduct ethnographic research in order to establish what kind of intervention would be appropriate. This was hugely difficult for people to understand, and members of Khayaalethu were often mystified by what I was doing there. I myself sometimes felt puzzled about what I was doing there, caught in between the ethnographic and intervention paradigms. Although I had initiated the project, I was at times comforted by the two University-based fieldworkers<sup>12</sup> who remained convinced about the necessity of attempting to 'root' literacy work within existing social processes and organisational structures, despite the difficulties they themselves encountered.

As the general membership of Khayaalethu became more alienated from the broader structures of the organisation, and I started to sympathise with their 'plight', I started to feel myself becoming more accountable to this group rather than to the management committee of Khayaalethu or the service organisation that had brought me in, in the first place. My project proposal committed me to working "within the logic" of the broader organisational structures but these were seriously failing the membership in my view. I felt bound by the idea of the need for gaining emic understandings of the situation in Khayaalethu. As far as possible I wanted to capture the sense of what it was like to be an 'ordinary member' in this process, and not have my views 'diluted or corrupted' by the contacts outside Khayaalethu which I would be able to mobilise as a result of my linguistic resources, cultural capital and simple physical mobility. This meant that there was a contradiction

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<sup>12</sup> The two University-based fieldworkers were post-graduate students who I employed on a part-time basis by drawing on the grant I had received from the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund.



within the data that I collected at the time and the focus of this thesis. I, myself, was physically embedded in Khayaletu, yet I came to realise that I needed to study the movement in and out of Khayaletu and across the organisational boundaries. This is one of the reasons why I have not presented the research here as a traditional ethnography, but using more “micro-ethnographic” methods (Erikson, 1996; Martin-Jones, 1995), have identified the instances in the data when meaning making processes literally physically shifted across sites within Khayaletu and from Khayaletu into other locations.

At the end of the process of data collection I moved away and have continued to work on this thesis from a distance. The results of this separation have influenced the direction this thesis has finally taken, leading me to take a more theoretical and analytical approach, as mentioned above.

### **Overview of data collected**

Following on from the ethnographic research I had conducted in 1993 as part of my Masters, and from my familiarity with the Social Uses of Literacy research<sup>13</sup>, when entering the Khayaletu site I adopted the same general stance at first. I was initially welcomed into the Management Committee, which allowed me to observe and record their meetings and enabled me to attend and record general meetings and any other processes, events or activities occurring on site. I took part in activities where I could, carrying concrete blocks, operating a concrete mixer, offering people lifts to suppliers, photocopying texts for people and explaining site plans. I did not wish to intervene in organisational processes in any way at that early stage; I saw the initial ethnographic process as leading to an analysis which would enable later interventions to be planned and undertaken.

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<sup>13</sup> The work reported on in Kell (1994) became part of the Social Uses of literacy project (Prinsloo and Brier 1996).

Difficulties arose however, when I needed to undertake aspects of the interventions suggested as part of the funded project, including the identification of what I had called a core target group and various activities to promote the uses of literacy and evaluate these. I was unable to identify a sub-group of Khayaalethu members to work with on literacy related issues; the Management Committee seemed to feel that I was there to support them rather than the members in general; the service organisations involved with Khayaalethu had very strong perspectives on the role of outside support workers which constrained the approaches we tried to take. As conditions deteriorated within the organisation we needed to remove ourselves from the site entirely for two periods of between a month and three months. The tensions led to the situation where we were simply not able to come close to the processes that were at the heart of the development, particularly those involving the management of money; we were constantly diverted, ignored or stone-walled in our attempts. The answer to this was simply patience, neutrality and persistence. After many months, very high levels of tension and disillusionment in the organisation and serious allegations of corruption, the Management Committee was finally ousted and we were able to start playing a more constructive role. As this role developed I felt more confident about asking members if I could tape-record meetings and discussions. I was also able to draw in two members of Khayaalethu as field workers for a brief period of time. They tape recorded sessions I was not able to attend and filled me in on processes and events, at one stage on a day to day basis. They photographed processes on site and we hoped to develop a “people’s history” of what was happening<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> We did not manage to achieve this. There were many reasons for this failure, including the constant level of stress amongst Khayaalethu members, my work situation did not enable me to spend the amount of time that was needed on site, the fieldworkers struggled to gain acceptance and difficulties in gaining wider support for the idea in Tndv and the SO.

A number of different interventions were trialled throughout. Briefly, these were:

- Production of a booklet based on oral testimony which outlined the formation of the savings clubs, the groups' struggle for land, and the beginnings of the building process.
- Translation into Xhosa and distribution of a number of different documents produced during the ongoing work of house building e.g. minutes of meetings with the City Council.
- Establishment of a small library of donated children's books in one of the fieldworkers' houses, and the observation of the processes that transpired.
- Documenting of people's experiences of house building, this involved writing down people's stories presented to us orally, and combining these with photographs in exercise books.
- The initiation of a story-writing project which was also short-lived but from which the data presented in Chapter Four is drawn.
- The most successful initiative involved the development of a strategy for recording and tracking expenditure amongst a group of thirty house builders. The process leading to this strategy was the most interesting aspect of the whole project. Ideologically it meant centering the process of control of expenditure back in the hands of the individual house builders, and supporting this process with field workers who could mediate the textual demands of controlling expenditure. Practically it meant that each of these thirty was given an A4 exercise book and glue, copies of the expenditure record sheets, and asked to stick these and any invoices, receipts and other documents that were encountered as part of the process, seeking assistance from fieldworkers and elected bookkeepers. Aspects of this process form the basis of Chapter Five.

I was influenced by Reder (1994), who suggested that there are many ways in which literacy development might be facilitated within the context of naturally-occurring literacy practices. He puts forward three ideas (I have added or elaborated these in the brackets):

- Modifying existing literacy practices (this involves the idea that people who already play the role of literacy mediators and helpers can be trained to 'give literacy away')
- Adding writing to existing cultural practices (this involves analysing existing practices like card-playing, and adding writing to these, so that exposure and involvement with text is incidental to the central practice – thus promoting acquisition)
- Using writing to innovate new cultural practices (the example which is central to Chapter Four is of introducing story-writing in the development context).

The two University-based fieldworkers (Somi and Nonthutu) and I were already playing the role (to a limited extent) of literacy mediators or helpers. In this approach we were trying to model what we hoped other mediators and helpers

could try to achieve within Khayaalethu. Clearly, there was an abundance of such mediators and helpers, the problem was that their ability to play such roles was highly constrained by wider power relations, gate-keeping and struggles around social mobility. After many struggles around the roles of Somi and Nonthutu, I later drew in two members of Khayaalethu to play this role (Monde and Nolwanda), which they did reasonably successfully for a short period of time. A number of challenges and dilemmas emerged from the employment of these pairs but are beyond the scope of this thesis. One key issue that must be discussed however, is that of language. All four fieldworkers were first-language Xhosa speakers, while I am a first language English speaker with little fluency in Xhosa. Disruptions in the employment of the fieldworkers and difficulties in defining their roles meant that often I worked by myself in Khayaalethu and I was hampered by my lack of fluency in Xhosa. Given the wider tensions and politics of the project, my ability to carry through the interventions was constrained.

It did not make sense, given the nature of my questions and interests, to collect ready-made texts. Given the centrality of the concepts of events and *practices* to the origins of this research my interest lay in the dynamics surrounding the production and uses of texts involving print (and at a later stage additional communicative modes like the gestural, visual and spatial), and the ways in which these texts indexed further social processes. Describing a process that feels closely allied with what I have attempted in this thesis, Silverstein and Urban write that:

The text artifact does indeed have a physical, temporal structure, precisely because it was originally laid down, or sedimented, in the course of a social process, unfolding in real time; on reading it is perceived and understood in real time. We seek the durational event of the laying-down process, insofar as traces of the original co(n)text in which a discourse fragment was configured are available to us. So what we are looking for is not the denotational text directly or simply, but rather indications of more originary text(s) of inscription (1996:5).

Collins (in Wortham and Rymes, 2003) suggests that recent contributions to linguistic anthropological inquiry, such as the work of Silverstein and Urban, for example, argue that you cannot study texts as separable from and somehow reflecting other entities, such as culture, power or identity. Instead analysts must study **entextualisation**:

...the continuous interplay of text, context and evaluation from which emerge what we think of as texts. From the study of this interplay or process, rather than of text artifacts in isolation, we gain insight into how linguistic practices construct, as well as reflect, aspects of culture, power or identity (ibid:35).

This interplay is a process and, in ethnography, it is the process not its linguistic product that needs to be understood. However, pinning down the contours shaping this “continuous interplay” is not a simple matter. As I started to chart these processes of entextualisation, I realised that the ethnographic principle of **situatedness** was limiting my explorations and that it was in the process of **recontextualisation** that other entities, such as power, became thrown into relief. It seemed that the materiality of text (expressed through literacy and other symbolic means) enabled meanings to ‘hold’ beyond the setting in which they were situated, and I will argue that power accrued to different participants in these processes as recontextualisation occurred. Suddenly I saw how much research into language concentrated on one-off instances of text production, or even more problematic, on the texts separated from their processes of design, production, distribution. Furthermore, I started to question what effects this partial view may be having on the teaching of literacy.

The data that I collected and analysed in Khayaletu (and earlier on in Site 5) was ethnographic data (I will explore the approach to ethnography below), however much of it did emerge from the interventions planned as part of the funded project. Together, the fieldworkers and I participated, observed, planned and worked over

many months. We attended numerous meetings of different groupings on site (I probably attended up to seventy such meetings, the fieldworkers another 30 or so between them). We participated in building processes, making concrete blocks, shifting bricks, holding the hosepipe for the concrete mixer. We observed a wide range of different processes connected with planning and building, discussions over house plans, interactions with the architect and the engineer, confrontations with the SO and HASSOC officials.

I took copious field notes, usually written up in the evenings after being in the field. In addition, I had the notes taken by the different fieldworkers who worked with the project at different times. As these fieldworkers were first language Xhosa speakers their notes captured detail that I was not able to capture. We noted details and discussions around the proposed interventions, stages in the intervention itself and whatever occurred around it and followed it. In some cases we collected the texts that were produced in the process, but were primarily interested in the interactions surrounding the production of the texts i.e. the entextualisation processes, often traced through another step in the sequence to their recontextualisation, in some cases across two, three or four different sites (either within Khayaletu or from Khayaletu and beyond).

We undertook about 60 short interviews with members of Khayaletu, and these provided useful information about people's literacy practices and histories. In addition I was able to interview and participate in discussions with a number of people involved with the development, including the SO fieldworkers and officials and HASSOC officials.

At a later stage in the project I began to tape record meetings and various other small interactions, like a discussion at the building supply shop. I was able to transcribe a number of sequential sets of meetings, at the same time that I was

collecting field notes of the events and practices surrounding these meetings. These meetings were all conducted in Xhosa. I had difficulties with this and usually had someone sit next to me to translate. Transcriptions were done later so that there was a lag in my own interpretation of this data.

I outline below the ways in which I selected and categorised parts of this huge body of data, for the purposes of this thesis. But first it is necessary to explain aspects of what is usually seen as the methodological approach in more depth. Like Bloome et al (2005:8) I do not wish to “separate methodological issues and procedures from theoretical or epistemological issues”.

## **Ethnography**

The overall approach taken both in the funded project and in this thesis was grounded in the New Literacy Studies with its commitment to the ethnographic study of literacy. It also drew on the broader methods and concepts of linguistic anthropology (reviewed by Hornberger, in Wortham and Rymes, 2003: 248), bridging into what has recently been called linguistic ethnography<sup>15</sup>. According to Hornberger, linguistic anthropologists’ ethnographic study of language in use has developed mainly within three strands: the ethnography of communication, interactional sociolinguistics and microethnography:

All three of these strands focus on situated discourse, that is language use in context and they recognise the existence of multiple and alternative social roles and identities. Further, all three are grounded in linguistics and in particular the emic/etic analytical perspective, the methodological traits of using actual naturally occurring language data and seeking out native intuition and the analytical tool of discourse analysis (ibid:249).

Without going into depth on the nuances in definitions of ethnography I will summarise a few key features. Ethnography studies real-world settings, focusing on a particular place at a particular time, dealing with real people’s lives. The

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<sup>15</sup> It is my view however that linguistic ethnography has neglected literacy (or written language).

approach “is holistic, it can be multi-method and it is interpretive, aiming to represent the participants’ perspectives” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998:58). Ethnographers set aside their own definitions of actors, places, times, actions, events and other aspects of everyday life and identify and describe the emic (insider) terms for these dimensions of everyday life. Blommaert (2001a) suggests that two main features have become central in linguistic ethnography. Firstly, it is materialist, in the above sense of looking for real actors in real events, using real communicative codes with real effects in real life-worlds. An ethnographic approach to language starts from concrete, non-idealist and non *a priori* phenomena. Secondly, it is dialogic. Ethnography constructs knowledge through dialogue, and while it might be the study of communication, it is also communication itself. Both of these features locate what Blommaert calls “ethnographic epistemology” squarely in the realm of everyday interpretive procedures:

Ethnographic knowledge is constructed by means of everyday, mundane, interpretive procedures. Hence the frequency of inexplicable, intuitive and autobiographical status of much of what ethnographers know about their subjects. Method is very often added afterwards, and the interpretation of field data is in practice often the reconstruction of meanings in data by means of post-hoc structuring, categorising and clarification (2001a:4).

This brings us to the debate taking place over the past few years about treating ethnography as ***epistemology or methodology***. Street’s perspective on this debate (Linguistic Ethnography Forum, 2001; captured in verbatim notes from the session) is that if “ethnography is an interpretivist epistemology than how does that relate to particular methods? If you collapse the two then you lose the ability to see how methods relate to theories, they become the same thing and something is lost there”. Blommaert (2001a) however, outlines what he calls a “programmatic view of ethnography” which he claims includes an ontology and an epistemology, moving it way beyond the common perspective which views it as “a technique and



a series of propositions by means of which something can be said about 'context'" (p2)

A central theme in ethnography is the movement between emics and etics (Pike, in Headland et al, 1994). Often ethnography is seen as involving entry into a community to be studied and collection of data through participant observation. The data is then formulated or composed into an ethnographic account that tries to represent faithfully emic or insider understandings. What the 'etic' is in such an account is often vague. Blommaert (2001a:6) states that "the ignorance of the knower – the ethnographer – is a crucial point of departure". Tusting (2000:24) outlines the following phases in the ethnographic process: the ethnographer must firstly interact as participant –observer in the field and this interaction must be recorded in some way for later interpretation. These recordings then form the raw data on which the ethnographer reflects in the search for patterns. As time goes on, the ethnographer gains an increasing understanding about what matters in the field. Theoretical perspective is developed and tested against the observational interactions for validity, and these finally become the ethnography by being written. She claims that:

...at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise is the goal of being able to *explain* what is going on; the goal usually being to explain this in the same terms as community members would use thus offering a privileged representation of their own behaviours" (ibid:19).

The problem with this account of ethnography is its positing of the ethnographer as *tabula rasa* – on which the behaviours of the researched are inscribed. These are then presumably re-inscribed in the attempt at explanation. In Kell (2001c) I pointed out that Hymes (in Headland et al, 1994:119 - 134) had argued that it was unfortunate that the two terms emic and etic "have been assimilated into a dichotomy", but that Pike's (the person who first coined these two terms) original

formulation had three moments, not two. This formulation distinguished operationally among:

- A frame of reference with which an analyst or observer approaches data (etic 1)
- The discovery of valid relations internal to what is being studied (emic)
- A reconsideration of the initial frame of reference in the light of new results (etic 2)

Therefore Hymes points out the relation between emic and etic is not dichotomous but dialectical and is characterised thus:

- etic1 – emic - etic2

Hymes describes it as: “the dialectic in which theoretical frameworks are employed to describe and discover systems and such discoveries in turn change the frameworks” (1990:421).

The importance of this for my research is that it draws attention to the fact that my approach differs from the above descriptions in that there is an iterative process of ***theoretical development*** that is made explicit. What needs to be made clearer, I believe, in ethnography, (and this is the point that Pike and Hymes are raising) is the fact that the researcher goes into the field with prior theoretical frameworks and these have a major impact on the approach to data collection and analysis, on the ethnographic process in general. I will take two lines of exploration to further this debate. Firstly, I will explore issues around ***movement*** between theory and fieldwork. Secondly, I will explore the concept of ***emergence***.

### *On the relation between theory and fieldwork*

On the issue of movement: if we give these moments clearer names:

- etic1 will be called “0”
- emic will be called “1” and
- etic 2 will be called “2”.

There is a similarity here with Bernstein's (1996) notion of languages of description, which enable translation or transformation between what he called the internal descriptions and the external descriptions. The "internal language of description refers to the syntax whereby a conceptual language is created" (ibid:136) – this means that contrary to the customary uses of the term in anthropology - the *internal* is the language of the discipline or the community of scholarly practice to which the researcher belongs and whose concepts form his/her vocabulary. The *external* descriptions (in Bernstein's sense) are what in anthropological terms are emic, they are external to the theories and practices of the scholarly community, but internal to the situation being researched. The vantage point from which internal and external become meaningful terms is the academy. Bernstein, in my view, is trying to explain that it is the precise way in which movement between these two is constructed that is at the heart of academic research, and of what distinguishes weak from successful research. Hymes also addresses this (in Headland et al, 1994: 119-134) arguing that emics and etics are concerned with epistemology, the study of the nature and source of knowledge.

A lack of attention to these questions around movement and moments can give rise to particular problems in ethnographic research. On the one hand there are ethnographies that remain so true to the external description that they can only describe themselves<sup>16</sup>. This is the worry with Tusting's explanation above. On the other hand, Blommaert's critique of conceptions of context in Critical Discourse Analysis (2001b) suggests that the *a priori* contextualisations within CDA mean that the theory only reads itself. I would argue that it has not been derived in a principled enough way from the external descriptions. Furthermore, according to

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<sup>16</sup> This tendency can perhaps be seen to be associated with what Hammersley (1997) has called post-modernist ethnography (p9) in which "claims to be engaged in a scientific enterprise, to be concerned with facts, to be attempting to achieve value neutrality or objectivity etc have become rare, perhaps even taboo among qualitative researchers in Britain, and to some extent in the United States".

Blommaert, with Conversational Analysis the opposite happens and the description only describes itself, “talk is lifted to the replica of talk”, “the mediating link between thing and description – analysis – is elided” (2005:54).

The problems mentioned above, and referred to by Blommaert as well, seem to me to represent a form of either theoretical agnosticism or ‘sleight of hand’. Recent debates held under the auspices of the journal ‘*Ethnography*’ draw attention to the differences between analytic ethnography and the “traditional interpretive style that attempts to get to the crux of what is going on” (Snow, Morrill and Anderson 2002). Drawing on the work of Lofland (1995) these authors cite what they call two persistent criticisms dogging ethnographic research as the tendency for ethnographers to neglect the theoretical relevance and potential of research, and the relative dearth of systematic procedures for analysing field data in a fashion that facilitates theoretical elaboration across sites. They present three paths to theoretical development - theoretical discovery, theoretical extension and theoretical refinement.

Burawoy is one the most important figures in the field of ethnography developing an approach to what he calls theoretical refinement. In this approach he argues for ethnography to fall within a model of what he calls ‘reflexive science’<sup>17</sup> which takes as its premise the intersubjectivity of scientist and subject of study. The extended case study method makes the stock of academic theory, brought together with indigenous narratives, the starting point. But work with these two “languages” (in Bernstein’s terms) is not separated in time or place:

...with the extended case method, dialogue between participant and observer provides an ever-changing sieve for collecting data. This is not to deny that we come to the field with pre-suppositions, questions and

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<sup>17</sup> Burawoy’s “reflexive science” seems allied to what Hammersley has called “post-positivist” qualitative research, as opposed to what Hammersley calls “post-modernist” qualitative research.

frameworks but that they are more like prisms than templates and they are emergent rather than fixed (Burawoy, 1998:11).

I have been guided in my approach by Burawoy's model of reflexive science (summarised and elaborated in Burawoy, 1998:14 - 25), which takes context as a point of departure (but not of conclusion) and has four main principles. These are (in his terms):

- Firstly: intervention. "Intervention is not only an unavoidable part of social research but a virtue to be exploited". It is by mutual reaction that we discover the properties of the social order.
- Secondly: Process. The observer needs to unpack situational experiences by moving with the participants through their space and time. "Situational comprehension" is "aggregated" into an understanding of process". The move from situation to process is accomplished differently in different reflexive methods but it is always reliant on prior theory. Burawoy describes the move beyond social process to the "delineation of the social forces that impress themselves on the ethnographic locale".
- Thirdly: Structuration. With reference to these social forces, Burawoy states that this wider "field of relations cannot be bracketed or suspended, yet it is also beyond the purview of participant observation". In Giddens' perspective on structuration, structure "facilitates rather than constrains action, much as language allows speech" and "we are left with a voluntarist vision that emphasises the control we have over our worlds". Instead Burawoy prefers (drawing more on Foucault and Bourdieu) to work with a notion of structuration in which "structure or social forces really do confine what is possible, although they are themselves continually reconfigured" (ibid:15, and footnote p18).
- Fourthly: Reconstruction. Generality can not be inferred directly from data, but "we can move from one generality to another, to more inclusive generality. We begin with our favourite theory but seek not confirmations but refutations that inspire us to deepen that theory. Instead of discovering grounded theory we elaborate existing theory.

According to Burawoy, each of these principles has its correlate in extension processes. These are:

- Extending the observer to the participant.
- Extending observations over space and time.
- Extending out from process to force
- Extending theory.

In relation to the first extension process: the relation between ethnography and intervention becomes salient and it is central to the work that I undertook in Khayaalethu.

One of Street's interests (especially elaborated in 'Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives', 2001) has been the idea that ethnography feeds into programme and campaign design and development in adult literacy, at all stages. This seems to have, as an underlying premise, the idea that ethnography happens first and intervention second, with a linear and determining relation between the ethnographic data collection and interpretation and decisions that are then made for the intervention. This way of seeing certainly influenced the original proposal for the funded project at Khayaletu (in that ethnographic data would be collected and this data would then form the basis on which any interventions would be planned), but I found in reality that this sequence was a far more iterative but complex and messy process.

In addition, ethnographic data collection itself is already a form of intervention. To claim that the research process does not alter conceptions of and relations within the researched groups, and that programmes then intervene in a pristine field captured and rendered static in the findings, is to gloss over an important tenet of anthropology. This is that scientific inquiry alters the research object and the space of the construction of the object (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

### Emergence

The concept of emergence is also central to my approach to linking ethnography and intervention. Hymes discusses one of the limits of the emic approach:

If an emic approach is thought of as discovering recurrent pattern, then it does not "reach to emergent properties, unique configurations as when, for example, the nature of an audience changes the intensity of a performance, challenges a performer to an ad-hoc invention or permits a play upon a context not likely to be repeated (in Headland et al, 1994:120).

Rampton (2000) echoes this when quoting Z. Bauman (1992:192) who suggests that in late modernity regularity, consistence and system lose their primacy and insignificant phenomena prove to be decisive (because in Bauman's view

significance and numbers have parted ways). Our focus therefore needs to be on the unusual and spectacular. We need “a conceptualisation of language but close at hand in the linguistics of practice rather than the linguistics of systems and in the shift from variation to transposition as a way of envisaging linguistic movement across settings, time and space” (Rampton, 2000:101).

Fabian's “meta-anthropological” project (so termed by Said, 1989) focuses on this set of ideas, putting forward a close scrutiny of the discursive practices through which the communication necessary to generate new knowledge occurs (Fabian, 1990). So, for example, he looks very closely at how transcription or translation issues intervene in the dialogical encounters occurring in between what I have called moments 0 and 1 (as the anthropologist interrogates his/her prior theory in conversation with people in the field). In Fabian (1990) he shows how one of these performative encounters became emergent, a unique configuration when his questioning around the meaning of an unusual proverb (“power is eaten whole”) in connection with his own way of constructing his own stance in the field led to the development amongst a local theatre group of a play (a performance that was then televised nationally) around the proverb itself. This provided an intricate account, which Fabian (ibid) calls “performative” rather than the more usual “informative” anthropology/ethnography.

It is evident from this example that the sequence of 0 to 1 to 2 becomes more complex and iterative, less linear than in the traditional sequencing. Fabian's example seems to me to be an example of what Bernstein (1996:138) calls the ability of “the researched to re-describe themselves”. Because the “0 to 1 to 2” cycles in this particular research project were not linear, but were complex and compacted temporally, Fabian was able to spontaneously elicit and record these re-descriptions.

In my view, the key to Fabian's process is also **emergence**. As will be seen below and again in the following Chapter (Chapter Four) this concept of emergence played a pivotal role in the way I shifted my conceptualisation of both the work I was doing in Khayaletu and the eventual form of this thesis. Neither of these shifts would have taken place if I had not adopted a totally engaged stance in the field, more akin with the idea of ethnography as epistemology.

In relation to Burawoy's second extension process: extending over time and space, the fact that I was trying to limit my observations to single contexts lay at the heart of some of the problems I outlined in opening this chapter. To start to trace the ways in which people carried meanings across time and space was not to give up on ethnography, but in fact, to open it up, to view the intersecting groups which impacted on local situations as meanings were carried between them. I realised that as I started doing this and started seeing these patterns in my data that I was gaining a new perspective on a deeper research question about the relation between the local and the global. Events linked to events, but participants in these events did not always map one to one. Sequences of events spun out across time and place, like gossamer unwinding at the same time as it constitutes a web of meanings. Literacy practices were not an end in themselves analytically, but a constituent part of the broader sequences of events.

Only later did I come across the concept of multi-site ethnography. Eisenhart (2001) outlines the need to find ways of tracking the movement, instantiations and effects of symbolic and material forms in various places. She cites Marcus's notion of "multi-sited ethnography" which is "designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal physical presence" (1995:105). Burawoy has also addressed



this issue and his research group, which worked on “global ethnography”

(Burawoy et al, 2000), presented the question:

...one of the questions facing us was whether globalisation had rendered ethnography, apparently fixed in the local, impossible or even irrelevant. Our experience working on this project has suggested quite the reverse: rather than becoming redundant, ethnography's concern with concrete lived experience can sharpen the abstractions of globalisation theories into more precise and meaningful conceptual tools (2000: xiv).

The third of the extension processes mentioned above relates to structuration: the need to relate process to force. I see this as a question: what are the wider discursive/historical fields that both shape and are shaped by the processes being observed? In my research, this sharpened up into a question about how exactly entextualisation processes can be seen to index social structure? How do social actions both presuppose and reproduce regimes of power?

This is linked to Burawoy's final extension process which is theoretical extension. The concepts of events, practices and context are general in their scope. I needed more precise tools to describe and track the sequential tracing of the ways in which events become processes and what this could tell me about social structure. My research therefore has become a search for these more precise tools, and I conceptualise this as the development of a language of description for the study of meaning making as it crosses contexts.

#### *Theoretical extension towards the development of a language of description*

In Chapter Two I outlined theory and research informing my research questions, which has partially addressed the first research question – “How does the view of literacy as situated social practice account for the movement of meanings across contexts?” In this section, before outlining the way in which I worked with the ethnographic data, I extract and expand on particular angles from Chapter Two that have enabled me to explore and address the three further questions:

- What units of analysis are necessary and sufficient for the study of the movement of meanings across contexts?
- What does the study of shifts of meaning making across contexts contribute to understandings of literacy, in particular the notion of literacy practices?
- How are the local and the non-local conceptualised as meaning making traverses contexts?

In his book “Discourse: A Critical Introduction”, Blommaert (2005) makes an impassioned argument on the need for discourse analysis to focus on power effects, on how inequality is produced in, through and around discourse. For this to happen, a broadly based approach to language in society is needed, in “which the contextualisation of discourse is a central element. If we take context seriously we have to investigate it seriously”. At the heart of the approaches suggested by Blommaert is ethnography, with its intrinsic ties to context and to human activity (ibid:233). Such an approach is needed if we are to look at “the modes of production and circulation of discourse” rather than at more traditional concepts like “textual coherence with their assumptions of choice for participants in communication”. This leads him to suggest that instead of seeing language *in* context we need to see it *as* context: “Language provides the architecture of social behaviour itself” (2001a:4). He provides rich examples of studies showing how the production of a text may have value in one context, but as it shifts into another context it becomes differently valued or loses value (2005). This differential valuing is an integral part of what he calls “economies of signs and symbols” which operate at global level.

I argue that linguistic inequality is so deeply embedded in broader meaning making flows that its effects are often naturalised. Only a fine-grained ethnographic approach can bring these to the surface – ‘de-naturalising’ the processes. The moments when these flows crystallise into texts, when semiosis is “*punctuated*” (as Kress puts it [2000]), provide an opportunity for exploring the ways in which social relations are indexed in processes of entextualisation. It will

be necessary to not only point out that texts do become differently valued, but to explore the actual mechanisms whereby this occurs.

At a macro level, geographer David Harvey grapples with the question of how to characterise the relation between what he calls moments in social theory and their reification (as he calls it):

...flows often crystallise into things, elements, isolable domains or systems which assume a relative permanence... *Reifications of free-floating processes are always occurring to create actual permanences in the world around us* (Harvey, 1996:81) (my emphasis).

The “reifications” referred to by Harvey occur as meaning making flows “crystallise into things”. I believe this way of seeing can be helpful to literacy studies in two ways. Firstly, the idea of “crystallising into things” immediately invokes the issue of “materiality”, and as discussed in Chapter Two, this has tended to be a neglected area in literacy studies. Secondly, this idea relates to the conception of language articulated by Kress (2000) in which text is a “punctuation” in a ceaseless process of semiosis (p134), an actualisation in a particular social situation, which, coming back to the issue of materiality, can be “fixed” in a range of modes. For the moment, in what follows, I will use the notion of **reification** to describe this idea of “punctuation”. However, I will later contrast the use of that term with the concept of **naturalisation**, drawing on the work of Bowker and Star (1999:295). In addition, the term as used by Harvey (and by Wenger, see below) suggests a positive and necessary set of processes. I will question this view of reification throughout this thesis, by contrasting it with naturalisation. However, I will need to first work through the data in the following chapters in order that any discussion of these concepts is derived from the data rather than constructed *a priori*.

To stay with the meaning as defined by Harvey at this stage, the formation of written texts can involve quite a simple form of reification from the free-floating

mode of speech. In Chapter Five I concentrate on how a small shopping list was drawn up during a verbal discussion in a process of house-building. The spoken interactions between participants in this event and the reification of elements of these interactions (as written items) became more complex in another context, as the list turned into numbered and priced items on a computer in a shop, and later into material objects (a door, a lavatory, lintels) as these items were delivered to the building site. Still later these items were partially brought into the particular configuration of meanings that is a house through further and new forms of interaction and reification.

On the other hand, these reifications can form part of highly complex and specialised processes. For example, a person may talk about feeling tired, leading to a discussion with a doctor around very vague symptoms. This can lead to a nurse taking a blood sample from the patient, naming it with a felt pen and sending it to the laboratory. The blood sample becomes an item entered into a computer. The machine counts up the blood cells and spits this out as figures on a lab report. The figures are interpreted, when the medical technicians and specialists review them, contributing to a diagnosis, which leads to a treatment regime for the patient. In this case “the free-floating process” of a discussion around feeling tired has been brought into the particular configuration of meanings that is a ‘disease’ (see Bowker and Star [1999] for a full discussion of the reifications involved in the concept of disease, and Engeström [1996]). But mistakes can be made, maybe the blood was mixed up and the wrong person got the disease, maybe the computers were down, irregular results emerged. In this case ISO and HACCP routines trace where the mistake was made (for a detailed analysis of these routines in manufacturing and also for the idiosyncratic ways in which such standardised processes are taken up - see Belfiore et al, 2004). What had been

free-floating processes in health care in the past are now supposedly globally regulated and standardised, so that individual actions (sometimes seen as instances of 'non-compliance') can be traced.

In the chapters that follow I will argue that the text themselves are inseparable from their instantiation in different contexts but that in carrying meaning from context to context they are central in the creation of "the join" between the local and the non-local which Smith refers to thus:

The material text creates a join between the local and the particular, the generalised and the generalising organisation of the ruling relations. It is the materiality of the text itself that connects the local setting at the moment of reading into the non-local relation that it bears (Smith, 1999:79).

There are some important differences between these two examples – the ordering of materials and the diagnostic process. These are: the different scales related to time and space as these processes both flow and are reified and how these are managed by the participants; the degree to which regulation and standardisation is built into the communicative processes and the subsequent question of agency. These issues will be considered further in each of the chapters to follow.

In my earlier attempts at analysing my data and theorising while in the field (around 1998 and 1999) I was drawn towards the concept of communities of practice. I was also influenced by Hymes' view of community as the starting point of analysis of speech events.

### Communities of practice

Communities of practice are defined by Wenger (1999) as groups of people acting together over time in the social negotiation of meaning through processes involving mutual engagement towards the fulfilment of a joint enterprise. This involves the development of a shared repertoire of ways of doing things. Wenger argues:

...by starting with practice as a context for the negotiation of meaning, I do not assume that activities carry their own meanings. This is one reason I will not take discrete activities, or even systems of activities, as a fundamental unit of analysis (ibid:286).

In contrast, I make the opposite movement in this thesis - I do assume that activities carry their own meanings and the specification of these meanings through observation and analysis is the way in which we can arrive at an understanding of practices without making *a priori* claims about them. Duranti (1997), discussing Hymes, links the concepts of community and activity, saying at a micro-interactional level community refers to the small or large group of people organised around a common activity, however at a macro-interactional level community can mean a larger, real or imaginary reference group (as in Anderson's imagined communities) "whose constituency exceeds the boundaries of the here-and-now of any given situation" (ibid:290). Work on communities of practice is plagued by slippage around these two levels and this problem is confounded when the identification of discourses at or between these levels is attempted. Activity, it will be shown, becomes a central unit of analysis in this thesis, but it will be situated within an activity theoretical perspective rather than one of communities or communities of practice.

However, Wenger's further heuristic by which he identifies the formation and maintenance of communities is to bring together the ideas of participation and reification. This move links with an ongoing debate within the social sciences about the relation between materiality and sociality (Harre, 2002). Participation in Wenger's view refers to a process of taking part and also the relations with others that reflect this process. It suggests both action and connection: "... (w)hat characterises participation is the possibility of mutual recognition... (and) what we recognise is our mutual ability to negotiate meaning" (1999:57). Wenger's use of the concept of participation links his work with a range of approaches to the

concept in socio-linguistics and anthropology, where it is mainly drawn on in the analysis of spoken interactions. The work of Hymes (1972, in particular); Philips (1972); Erickson (1979); Goffman (1981); Goodwin (1990 and 1997); Hanks and Irvine (both in Silverstein and Urban, 1996); amongst many others, focuses on participation. Hymes (1972) noted that “participant” was perhaps the most critical dimension necessary for an adequate descriptive theory of ways of speaking. Duranti (1997:280) pointed out that participation can be seen as both a dimension of human interaction and a perspective of analysis. In a move away from a focus on speaker- hearer dyads, participation emerged as part of the study of the complex interactive work that both speakers and hearers do as they co-participate and modify their talk as it is emerging. Three main approaches bringing together these dimensions have developed. Philips’s work gives rise to the idea of participation structures, Goffman develops the idea of participation frameworks and Goodwin, the idea of participant frameworks. In this thesis I use the concept of participant frameworks, as this invokes the sense that there are shared expectations amongst participants about protocols for turn-taking within events. Goodwin explains that “the analysis of participation within activities makes it possible to view actors as not simply embedded within context, but as actively involved in the process of building context (in Duranti 2001:172). However, the view generally is that “a focus on participation provides the anthropologist with the opportunity to study from an integrated perspective how members of discourse communities use language and embodied action to constitute their social worlds” (ibid:174).

Most of this work, however, only deals with spoken language and does not touch on written language, or other modes of communication. I will therefore use the

idea of participant framework as a base, but embed it in a wider framework of mediated action, as discussed below.

More recently as indicated in Chapter Two, some researchers have shifted to focus on the concept of text and entextualisation, and in the work of Bauman and Briggs (1990) and Silverstein and Urban (1997) this has merged with research on performance. The salience of this move for my research is very dependent on the way in which *text* is conceptualised and defined. I have touched on this in Chapter Two, indicating that in Hodge and Kress's view text is the concrete material object produced in discourse, generally thought of as linguistic (either spoken or written) but increasingly seen to be realisable in any mode. Bauman and Briggs (1990) suggest that a distinction between discourse and text is important. They suggest that text is discourse rendered decontextualisable, and that entextualisation is the process of rendering discourse extractable, that it can be lifted out of its interactional setting.

Interactional setting implies participation. In relation to this thesis a crucial question then is what happens to participation when the text is lifted out of the interactional setting? In addressing this question I will draw on a wider set of social theories.

Wenger, drawing from a more sociological and anthropological theoretical tradition than the socio-linguistic, puts forward the concept of reification. The roots of the concept (and the linked concept of fetishisation) lie in Marx's work on commodity theory and links with theories of ideology and identity. Reification can be defined as:

...the act ...of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent of man) and govern his life (Bottomore, 1983:411).



Wenger (1999) defines it as the “process of giving form to our experiences by producing objects that congeal this experience into “thingness”. It has something to do with “concreteness”, with “projected reality”: “We project our meanings onto the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality of their own” (ibid:58). Wenger insists that participation and reification come as a pair, each cannot be considered in isolation from the other.

There is a question here about degrees of independence. What extent of independence from sensuous human relations and actions is needed before a text, concept or object can be considered to be reified? Unless there is some specificity to the concept it cannot have any use. Any degree of decontextualisation can remove a text or artifact, rendering it independent to greater or lesser extents. Performance, as so well explored by Bauman and Briggs (1990), detaches text from context. Can such detached texts be said to be reified? As they become detached, are their indexical ties to the context from which they originated severed? What is at stake in defining reification?

Social facts become thing-like entities because (and insofar as) actors fail to calculate their own performative contribution to them and continue to treat them as things (Pels et al, 2002:11).

Initially the data that I was collecting at Khayaletu seemed to provide a clear example of a community of practice. It involved a group of people acting together over time in the social negotiation of meaning, through mutual engagement in a joint enterprise and developing a shared repertoire. Every activity I observed on site was about participating in and (in Wenger’s terms) reifying the decided meanings with the houses that were built as the ultimate reification<sup>18</sup>. However, I found that there were limits to the usefulness of this approach. The concept of communities of practice seemed to run into a dead end, the consensual quality

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<sup>18</sup> I reported on this in Kell (2001, 2002, 2003 and 2006); see also Barton and Hamilton (2005)

associated with the concept could not enable me to work with the notion of boundaries nor could it account for power struggles and changes over time. The participation and the reification were certainly very evident and have been very useful concepts in my analysis, but what happened to the community when I wanted to explore 'flows' and shifting across contexts? What happened to it when it became riven with conflict and no patterning was evident? What happened when splinter groups still made use of some of the old practices or new ones had not yet clearly emerged? 'Communities' did not appear to be the most useful concept to which to ascribe 'participation' or belonging.

In my earlier work (Kell, 1994; 1996), I had often used the concept of 'Discourses' to explore questions of belonging or not belonging, drawing on Gee's distinction between acquisition and learning (1992) and the idea of mastering a discourse as leading to a sense of belonging. The advantage of this was its fluidity. This approach could account for power struggles, for fluidity, hybridity and change. Gee's later development of the concept of affinity spaces (2004) also has relevance here but again is value-loaded – what about people who only feel affinity with each other in certain limited aspects of their practices but continue to be bound together?

As I tried to answer these questions I realised that I was moving into new territory which will be explained further below, and in the chapters that follow.

### *Membership versus participation, reification versus naturalisation*

A different and valuable angle on Wenger's concept of reification is adopted by anthropologists, Bowker and Star (1999), who also root much of their analysis in the idea of communities of practice, drawing on the earlier work on communities of practice of Lave and Wenger (1991). Bowker and Star, however, introduce the terms "membership" and "naturalisation" thus:

Learning the ropes and rules of practice in any given community entails a series of encounters with the objects involved in the practice: tools, furniture, texts and symbols among others. ...membership in a community of practice has as its *sine qua non* an increasing familiarity with the categories that apply to all of these. As the familiarity deepens, so does one's perception of the object as strange or of the category itself as something new and different. Anthropologists call this the naturalisation of categories or objects. The more at home you are in a community of practice, the more you forget the strange and contingent nature of its categories seen from the outside. ...Membership can thus be described individually as the experience of encountering objects and increasingly being in a naturalised relationship with them (Bowker and Star, 1999: 294).

These perspectives seem to suggest that the relationship between the pairs in the binaries is a productive and necessary one, inevitable in human society which has always relied on tools and artifacts for the accomplishment of purposes.

As I started to analyse the body of data I had accumulated I started to become fascinated with the question of what made for a participation/reification process and what made for a membership/naturalisation process? In searching to explicate the ways in which the text forms that "join" between the "local and the non-local relation that it bears" (Smith, 1999) is it naturalisation or is it reification that is at the heart of the join? What factors would make one or the other and what is the difference? This is a central question that I will return to in the following chapters.

Furthermore, Bowker and Star (1999) make a very important contribution which somewhat rescues the concept of "community" with their explorations around the concept of boundaries and boundary objects. They stray away from "communities" and towards the idea of "categorical work" and classification theory (this is reminiscent of my own approach to discourse mentioned above), linking this with the concept of boundary infrastructures. They suggest that categorisation occurs conceptually in the space between a "thing" and an "action" and that this question has been at the heart of social science for the past 100 years (ibid:285), echoing developments in both activity theory and actor network theory in particular. Pels et al (2002:1) claim that "objects are back in strength in contemporary social theory":

High time after this panegyric of textuality and discursivity, to catch our theoretical sensibilities on the hard edges of our social world again, to feel the sheer force of things which strike back at us with unexpected violence... Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this new constellation is our (re)discovery of the multiple new ways in which social and material relations are entangled together, blurring conventional distinctions between the hardware and the software of our lives.

The trouble is: material texts are both discursive and hard-edged! In a world where work is increasingly textualised, and where economic production is dependent on symbolic analyses, Pels's binary is difficult to hold. On the other hand, Bowker and Star see classification systems as tools that are both material and symbolic.

Bowker and Star focus in on what they call "attempts to represent information across localities" claiming that we lack a good relational language here (1999:290). They provide some examples (shared software applications drawing on object-oriented approaches) which they say artfully integrate local constraints, received standardised applications and the re-representation of information. When this information becomes firstly, "an ongoing stable relationship between different social worlds" and secondly, "shared objects are built across community boundaries – then boundary objects arise" (ibid: 291). Boundary objects are one way that the tensions between different viewpoints may be managed, through "artful juggling, gestalt switching and on the spot translating" (ibid: 291). If both people and information objects inhabit multiple contexts and a central goal of information systems is to transmit information across contexts, then a **representation** is a kind of pathway that includes everything populating those contexts. This includes people, things-objects, previous representations, and information about its own structure.

Bowker and Star claim that standardisation has been one of the common solutions to this class of problems, and that standardisation answers aspects of the first three questions, but carries all sorts of moral and political implications. A richer

vocabulary is therefore needed, and this is where they move to “communities of practice” and introduce their take on them - involving the concepts of membership and naturalisation. Boundary objects are working arrangements that resolve anomalies of naturalisation without imposing a naturalisation of categories from one community or from an outside source of standardisation (ibid: 297).

Bowker and Star also however, touch on activity theory and actor network theory in order to elaborate their theory of “objects” or “things”, noting that something only “becomes an object in the context of action and use, it then becomes as well something which has the force to mediate subsequent action”:

...naturalisation means stripping away the contingencies of an object's creation and its situated nature. A naturalised object has lost its anthropological strangeness. It is in that narrow sense de-situated – members have forgotten the local nature of the object's meaning or the actions that go into maintaining and recreating its meaning....The more naturalised an object becomes the more unquestioning the relationship of the community to it: the more invisible the contingent and historical circumstances of its birth (ibid:298).

One of the aims of this thesis is to explore these ideas specifically with reference to the design and production of written texts, not so much with regard to the referential contents of such texts, but to the processes of entextualisation and recontextualisation in and across boundaries. At the same time as grappling with the question of what the unit of analysis was within which the analysis of reification or naturalisation could take place, it was also necessary to sharpen the focus on context. In order to conceptualise boundaries and the contexts contained within them, while at the same time avoid the problems with ‘community’, I have had to search for ways of conceptualising context which are better suited to the purposes of this research.

## **Activity theory in an exploration of the concept of context**

How should context be conceptualised if it is not to be viewed as a container but, to use Blommaert's terms again, as "the architecture of social behaviour itself, and thus part of social structure and social relations" (2001a: 4). In working towards a theoretical framework which suited my need to study context and recontextualisation, I needed to draw also on the primacy of communicative intention and the agency of actors, if I was to consider the relation between the semiotic resources at play and their mobilisation within particular social practices.

According to Engeström, phenomenological and ethno-methodological analyses focus on dyadic interaction, attempting to define contexts as social situations, as spaces of interactive experience or as fields of discourse. Although contexts are seen here as interpersonal constructions, they are commonly treated as purely linguistic, symbolic and experiential entities. This makes contexts look like something that can be treated at will by two or more persons in interaction, as if independently of the deep-seated material practices and socio-economic structures of the given culture (Engeström, in Lave and Chaiklin, 1996:66). A tradition which attempts to look beyond the immediate context of situation and towards the wider macro-level social and political structures affecting communication is outlined by Russell (outlining theories of writing in context in 1997), as "the most elaborated current theory of context" - dialogism. With Bakhtin as its central theorist, dialogism draws on post-structuralist theories which position discourse centrally as mediating interactions among conversants.

Yet the metaphor of conversation is also limiting, according to Russell (ibid: 509). With its overriding emphasis on oral and written utterance as discourse, dialogism brackets off a wide range of non-conversational actions and the material tools through which they are carried out. A further limitation (and here Russell draws

from R. Engestrom [1995]) arises from the focus on the dyad as the level of social analysis, with “the behaviour of collectives beyond the conversational moment analysed only in terms of the heteroglossic interpenetration of voices of different social languages in conversation” (ibid:510). The problem is that many collectives (disciplines, professions) have long-term objectives and motives beyond conversation, which condition – but do not determine – participants’ actions in powerful ways. So the object of the dialogue is not the conversation in itself but some **shared object** and **long-term motive** to do something beyond discourse. This perspective is relevant to the work of my thesis, with its focus on shared physical work around the building of houses.

Lave (in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996) presents us with a further theoretical tradition represented mainly by activity theory, where the central theoretical relation is historically constituted between people undertaking socioculturally constructed activity and the world in which they are engaged. Meaning is not created through individual intentions, it is mutually constituted in relations between activity systems and persons acting. For activity theory:

...contexts are neither containers nor situationally created experiential spaces. Contexts are activity systems. An activity system integrates the subject, the object and the instruments (material tools as well as signs and symbols) into a unified whole (Engestrom, in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996:67).

The idea of an activity system as developed by Engestrom (1987, 1990; in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996) is as a heuristic for understanding this **integration**. An activity system is an ongoing, object-directed tool mediated human interaction which is historically conditioned. Discursive tools in particular, as well as material artifacts, mediate between the actors/agents, the motive or direction of the activity and the object of the activity (its outcome). Russell (1997) argues that activity theory can perhaps facilitate analysis of writing and learning by allowing us to theorise and trace the interactions among people and the inscriptions called texts

(and other material tools) ***without separating either from collective ongoing motivated action over time.***

Research in the field of situated cognition, and in the activity theory tradition, has been interested in processes involving the changing nature of engagement in activity. Much research in these fields, however, has focused on situations which are relatively stable institutionally and physically, for example, workers in a hospital, insurance claims processing clerks, workers in a dairy and so on. At Khayaletu, there were few such stabilities. Activities took place across a range of contexts, both within the site and well beyond it; relations between groups shifted constantly, alliances were formed and broken. Context, as a possible unit of analysis, was deeply and fundamentally unstable. However, if it was conceptualised always and everywhere as animated by the specific actions of subjects engaging in meaning making processes, it could be seen to shift accordingly. The way in which it was modelled etically needed to match its fluidity emically.

The value of this approach for my research is that the central focus in an activity system is the subject/agent/actor undertaking some kind of action in order to achieve a purpose with a motive. The subject can be either an individual, a dyad, a group or an institutional structure of some kind, but in order to be studied as an activity system the focus has to be an identified action, behaviour or communicative event undertaken by the subject or agent. In my case, the focus is on communicative events. Engestrom states that the subject refers to the individual or sub-group whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis (in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996:67).

One of the elements in the activity system (beyond the subject/actor) is the mediational means available to the actor. Engestrom (1999:29) claims that this



idea runs as the unifying and connecting lifeline throughout the works of Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria. Writing in 1999, Engestrom draws attention to the importance of artifacts in the development of understandings about processes of *control*. By focusing on the mediational means necessary for individuals to develop control, following Vygotsky, "the perspective is ...an invitation to serious study of artifacts as integral and inseparable components of human functioning" (ibid:29). In any given interaction, such tools are seen to mediate thought between the subject and the context.

The relation between mediational means and semiotic resources (as explained in Chapter Two) needs to be clarified. A resource can be characterised as "available means" (Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate dictionary, 1960). The resources discussed in Chapter Two were defined as:

- capabilities - either individual or distributed across individuals; and especially in the case of literacy, involving coding, pragmatic, semantic and critical capabilities
- technologies – for example in the case of literacy, a pencil or a computer
- artifacts - for example, in the case of literacy, a recognised genre or simply a piece of paper with writing on it.

There are two levels at which semiotic resources need to be considered. The first is the level of whether they are available or not available in a particular context as a result of historical forces, and the degree to which they are available or not.

Secondly, what it is about the context that makes one semiotic mode more appropriate in terms of fit between function and form in any communicative activity.

From the perspective of activity theory, can a semiotic mode then be characterised as mediational means? I think it can, provided that it is available to the subject to be drawn on for the purposes of the activity animating the life of the activity system. The subject, in drawing on one or other semiotic mode, operates under

conditions of choice and constraint and these are historically conditioned rather than determined. The importance of studying mediational means as elements of activity systems is that they are not tools unless they have been put to some use, and the uses of a single material thing may differ over time and across different contexts. Studying semiotic resources in this way avoids the problems of mode-determinism (Street, 2000:21; Kell, 2004) and reification, and reflects the anthropological approach within which the New Literacy Studies is rooted.

The next element of an activity system is the object/motive. This refers to the problem space or raw material on which the subject/actor brings to bear various tools in ongoing interaction with others. The object is changed over time to produce an outcome, and an overall direction/motivation is implied, as well as contested.

At the bottom of the triangle Engestrom situates three further elements: rules, community and division of labour. According to Engestrom, the rules refer to the explicit and implicit regulations, norms and conventions that constrain actions and interactions within the activity system. Human beings not only use instruments, they also continuously renew and develop them, whether consciously or not. They not only obey rules, they also mould and reformulate them – and so on (in Chaiklin and Lave, 1996:67). Between the components of an activity system, continuous construction is going on.

Engestrom uses the term 'community' at the base of his heuristic, and sees the community as tending to share the same general object or problem space as the actor. However, activity systems are heuristics. They are not discovered as emic constructions on the part of the researched through ethnography, but are posited etically in the analytical work undertaken by the researcher. For this reason I do not support the use of the term "community" (with the associations I have outlined

in Chapter Two). I have chosen the concept of “participant frameworks” instead of the concept of community, as it seems to fit the intention of the heuristic as well as align the research in this thesis more closely with the theoretical frameworks of socio-linguistics and linguistic anthropology<sup>19</sup>.

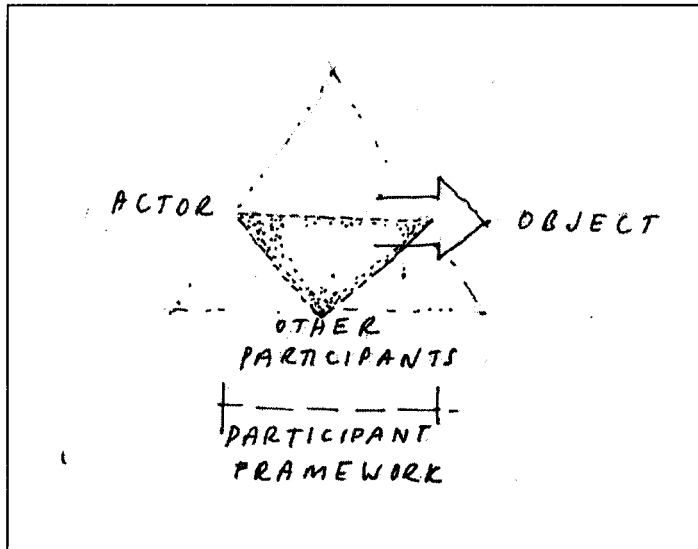
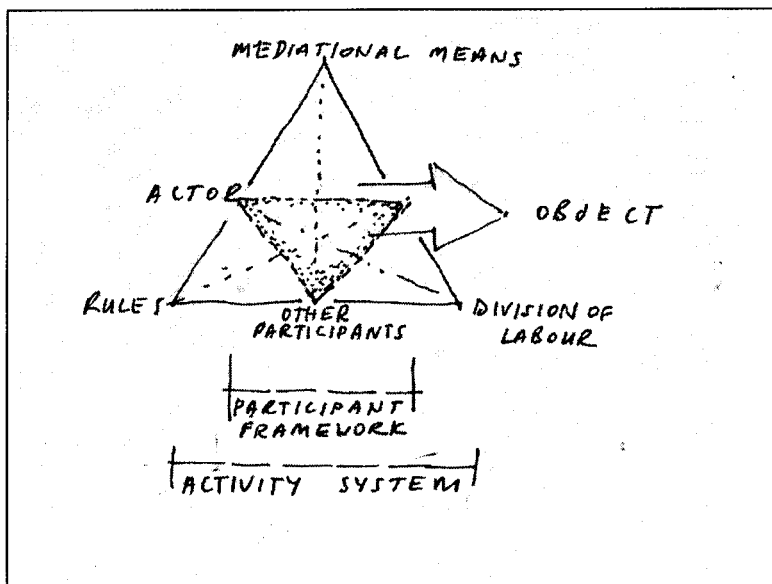


Figure 3.5: Participant framework

The concept of the division of labour refers both to the horizontal division of tasks between the members of the community and to the vertical division of power and status. The line between the division of labour and the actor, for example, indicates that the kind of question a researcher would be asking is - to what extent is the actor restricted in their activity by the division of labour?

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<sup>19</sup> Boer et al (2002) follow a similar approach in adapting Engestrom's heuristic. They use the term “actors involved” instead of community.



*Figure 3.6: Activity system (adapted from Engeström, 1999)*

### **Data and a language of description**

The following chapters are sequenced to show the development of the approach, in a sense, to trace that narrative. So, for example, it was while working on the process described in Chapter Four that I came to the realisation that I needed to prioritise meaning making and the shifting of meaning across context. (I tentatively presented these ideas in Kell, 2000b; 2001c and 2002). After that and from the vast quantities of data collected I distilled out four meaning making trajectories forming the basis of the chapters which follow. The chapters drawn from the Khayaletu project are not presented chronologically i.e. following the temporal sequences of the house building process. The reason for this is that I am not telling an ethnographic story about Khayaletu, I am presenting the development of a method for analysing meaning making trajectories.

The reconstruction of a detailed narrative for each of these trajectories played a central role in the development of the approach. The events of the following chapter (Chapter 4) provided me with the insights I needed to address the central problems articulated at the beginning of this chapter, and used as central reference points throughout. In reconstructing the narratives I drew on all the

sources of data that I had collected: field notes, notes taken verbatim from conversations and later typed, taped transcripts and minutes of meetings, photographs and small texts that I had collected<sup>20</sup>.

From the reconstruction of the narratives I identified the idea of a meaning making trajectory, and was able to study this as it crossed contexts, across both space and time. If the approach was to be applicable more widely, I realised that I needed to see if I could identify further trajectories within my data. Once I developed the main elements in the method I quickly realised that I could also apply it to some of the data that I had collected in my earlier research in Site 5, in particular the sequence described in the introduction to this thesis. The next step, therefore, was to isolate further meaning making trajectories from the huge body of ethnographic data that I had collected at Khayaletu. This was possible and each of these trajectories forms the content of each of the chapters to follow. The first move in doing this was to reconstruct the full narrative for each trajectory, again drawing on all sources of ethnographic data.

The choice of these trajectories was determined by the extent to which each of them could demonstrate how a particular meaning making process shifted across contexts. Each of these trajectories makes up one of the chapters to come. Each of the trajectories manages to illuminate a number of sequential crossings at different scales, rather than just from one context to another. In addition each

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<sup>20</sup> It was not always easy to collect texts, as I did not want to remove them from the ongoing flow of events and take them to my office for photocopying. Wherever possible I did do this, and wherever possible I took photographs of the actual texts as they were being used. The following fieldnote expresses some of the difficulties:

*30/10/00 I feel very frustrated not to be able to see the documents themselves...This is a research methodology issue in that the facilities are just not there to really do the kind of data collection that one would like (photocopier for example) and one cannot take the documents away with one because they are always in use from day to day. It would feel very intrusive to ask to take the list of names away, for example, for the night to photocopy it. The processes are so fragile, I suppose they are so unreified or perhaps over reified (!). Maybe that's the key question! Trying to understand which it is and why? That would also link into the fragility of literacy practices, the lack of a safety net and how the problem is contained through processes of participation. I do think that the issue of balance between participation and reification is the central one, but I don't know the explanatory power of the concept of reification if I can't decide if something is over-reified or under-reified.*

trajectory draws on different modes of communication rather than just the linguistic (written or spoken). Finally, however, the production of a written text in a particular genre plays a central role in each trajectory, although other texts in sub-genres are also invariably involved. In Chapter Four the production of a written story is the centrepiece. In Chapter Five lists of items are central. In Chapter Six a recording process involving the drawing up of lists and numbering items (people, names, plots, dates, hours) on the lists and on a plan is the focus. In Chapter Seven the genres are more hybridised and more closely linked with verbal discussions, but visual texts (architect's plans) are referred to throughout.

Since the following chapters trace the analytical journey, it is left to the final chapter, Chapter Eight, to set out the language of description as a whole, to summarise its validity and to present what it made visible, from the mass of data accumulated in the field.

## **Conclusion**

The focus of this thesis is the development of a language of description for studying the "movement of meanings across contexts". I argue that this is a valid approach to understanding a wide range of processes in everyday life, in which meanings traverse boundaries, becoming recontextualised as they are realised in different communicative modes. People's realisation of such meanings in communication is dependent on their recognition of the discourses in which they are embedded, moment by moment. I suggest that it is in these meaning making flows that the locus of theorising the local/global relation can be found.

## Chapter Four. Trajectory One: Writing a wrong

*Some material things are passive in relation to people, other things are active. Whether something is passive or active is largely story-relative (Harre, 2002:23).*

### Introduction

This chapter is based on an analysis of data from Khayaalethu. The data presents a narrative of the efforts made by a member of Khayaalethu to put right the difficulties that she had faced with her house, a process that took place over about seven months in 2000. During my analysis of this process I realised that I needed to address theoretical problems and limitations in my previous research and that in order to do this I would need to make a number of shifts in my analytical frameworks. These shifts involved:

- Focusing on 'flows' as sequences of events versus singular 'events'
- Theorising the boundaries of context and the place of practices
- Shifting from linguistics to multi-modality and semiotics.

These three shifts, I hoped, would enable me to explore the fourth issue of:

- The need to find a warrant for making claims about literacy, power and social structure.

In what follows I chart the moves made as I analysed the data. At the time of starting this (back in 2000), I was not aware that what I was doing would lead to the overall focus of this thesis. I therefore present parts of this chapter as a narrative of my experiences at that time. I will deal with the first, second and third key problems above, leaving my discussion of point four for the conclusion to this thesis.

The data for this chapter is drawn from an ethnographically-based intervention at Khayaalethu during the second phase of my involvement there. What was happening on site in this phase can be seen in the following table:

Phase	Period	Processes
1	04/98-08/99	Starting out; establishment of leadership structures with the support of the SO; establishing bases for participation; building of first twenty houses; difficulties encountered in managing the processes
2	08/99-07/00	Period of entrenchment of leadership; building of next forty houses; consolidation of difficulties in managing processes; bureaucratisation of participatory processes; allegations of financial corruption emerge and so on.
3	08/00-06/01	Eventual ousting of the leadership; vacuum emerging; building slowing down to a trickle; emergence of new leadership; a renewed emphasis on participation and accountability.

*Figure 4.1: Explanation of three phases at Khayaletu*

During the earlier part of this phase I found it necessary to stay away from the site because of high levels of tension, but had returned and tried to undertake work supporting the keeping of expenditure sheets. These efforts had not been successful and I tried a new approach, which simply involved trying to get people to write stories about their experiences.

Data for this chapter were collected in a number of ways. Firstly, I was a participant observer on site throughout, getting drawn into discussions, asked for my opinion, helping out with building and driving people around when necessary. I observed meetings, recording what was happening in note form (as far as possible verbatim) and these notes were written up as field-notes. Secondly, since this particular chapter involves a community-based story-writing intervention that was initiated by me (see Chapter Three for background to this), my fieldworker and I took detailed minutes of the meetings which we then typed, translated and circulated to the small group that was involved (explained in more detail below). As I realised what was happening I started to group this data into a sequence of events.

The data will first be presented as a detailed narrative. The focus of the narrative is the activities of a member of Khayaletu who I have called Nomathamsanqa or Noma. Noma was experiencing great difficulties with her house, at a time of high tension within Khayaletu and a loss of confidence in the Management Committee



(MC) with associated allegations of corruption against MC members. Three of these members had become increasingly powerful and insulated from the broader membership; these were referred to by the other members as the “*three amigos*”. Nomathamsanqa was about 35 years old, living alone with her two small children and surviving on a disability grant. As a result of her disability (the nature of which did not become clear to me until two years after I first met her) she had been allocated what was called a “show house”, built as a training exercise for the purpose of demonstrating aspects of the building process. Shortly after moving in, Noma appeared to be very distraught and one day she called me over to show me the problems with her house. She had tried to raise her problems with the MC but to no avail. I analyse the ‘writing a wrong’ process as starting at this point, when Noma seemed to take the first step to raise the problem more formally, and that involved putting it on the agenda of Khayaletu meetings, which supposedly represented the community as a whole.

### **Narrating “writing a wrong”**

Over a few months prior to the first sequence which I analyse, Noma tried to raise her problem informally with members of the Management Committee, and other Khayaletu members. This would really be the first sequence of activities, but since I had no notes from those occasions, or a clear memory of them, I have focused on the next set of events, and subsequent ones. Each has been given a name derived from the key events in the sequence:

- Speaking the problem (1)
- Writing the problem (2)
- Reading the problem (3)
- Negotiating the problem (4)
- Shifting the problem (5)
- Materialising the solution (6)

### 1. Speaking the problem (February to April 2000)

Over about a three-month period in the middle phase of the project Noma tried to articulate her problem a number of times in community meetings.

These meetings played a central role in the co-ordination of the house-building process. The meetings were called the “General” (referring both to the structure of regular meetings as well as to the nature of the grouping of people gathering at these events, the General membership) and were held on a weekly basis in a dilapidated building called “the Garage”. They were usually run by the chair of the Management Committee (MC), MamaToleni, and attended by around 25 to 40 members of Tndv. No ‘outsiders’ (apart from either Somi or Thuthu and I) were present in the meetings at this point. MamaToleni (and sometimes the other two *amigos* – who were also known by the English term: “the threesome”) always entered the meeting some time (between 15 and 30 minutes) after it had started, at which point control would shift to her and strong routines would come into play, with all communication going through the Chair and members rising slightly or raising their hands to indicate they wanted to speak. An agenda would be drawn up and the minute-taker would write this down in her book (often this would have been done prior to the arrival of the three amigos). Issues on the agenda were usually presented by MamaToleni for discussion. The majority of questions and problems would be answered by MamaToleni, or perhaps elaborated by another MC member. Participation was limited to a small number of participants in the group, while remaining members tended to stay quiet or engaged in byplay (tut-tutting as a form of disapproval, murmuring of “yho!” as an exclamation of disbelief or disapproval, the shaking of heads or exclaiming) which expressed the serious, but not articulated, divisions and tensions within Khayaletu at that stage in its history.

Noma seemed to know that she was going to raise her problem in these general meetings, either as an item emerging under regular proceedings, or as a special item under “general” at the end of the agenda for the meeting. There was a particular pattern in the way she raised her problem. It was always raised as an individual problem (rather than a collective one) in that no one else at Khayaletu had experienced the problem in the same way. She would start off by raising her hand to indicate that she wanted to say something as was common in the General. Almost immediately she would say that she needed to raise her problem, and would launch into it, sometimes rising to a standing position at the same time (which was not very common in meetings but did sometimes occur). There was therefore no space for the issue to be acknowledged formally by the Chair or for her to be granted the chance to speak in the meeting. Very quickly, Noma’s voice would start to rise, she would start talking more quickly and slightly hysterically, sometimes rocking her body forwards and backwards. She would initially try to make eye contact with the Chair and other members of the MC, but this would stop after a while and she would tend to look into the distance or close her eyes. On most of these occasions she would become breathless and start sobbing. The members present would hear her quietly, casting their glances downwards to the floor and making minimal eye contact.

Over a few minutes (perhaps between about two and four) Noma would intone that the roof was leaking, the wind was coming in between the windows and walls, the walls were unfinished. She would say that this was causing her and her children to be sick, she had put her trust in the organisation and that she had no way of putting this right herself, and seeing that it was a show-house it needed to be put right for her.

The chair usually tried to cut her short, by saying that they would discuss it outside the meeting and that the meeting needed to finish, although there were occasions when Nomathamsanqa was told to reserve her presentation for another meeting. Her presentation was therefore curtailed on each occasion it was raised.

## 2. Writing the problem (1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2000)

About twelve weeks or so after Noma had first tried to raise her problems in the general I had managed to pull together a group of about eight people who were interested in reading and writing. This was the very short-lived, neighbourhood-based and informal group called by members 'Masifundisane'<sup>21</sup>. I had stressed that whatever needed to be written or read would be a direct part of the house-building process, and achieved through mediation and apprenticeship in purposeful activities. At a time of extreme tensions within the organisation and allegations of corruption our attempts to work with recording expenditure had been fraught with problems. As a fairly arbitrary 'stop gap' I had suggested that individuals in the meantime could write or dictate stories about the building process at Tndv.

We had intended to have the first meeting in the garage, but found it mysteriously locked that day, so this meeting and the follow-up one were held in Monde's house, where cups were borrowed from neighbours, Monde boiled up some water, I contributed some sugar and we all had tea or coffee as the discussion started.

Nonthutu and I took very detailed minutes of these meetings<sup>22</sup>. We circulated the minutes in both English and Xhosa to the group as part of our initiative to both "add writing to existing cultural practices" and "use writing to innovate new cultural practices" (Reder, 1994). We were therefore interested in monitoring people's

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<sup>21</sup> Masifundisane was the term chosen by the group – it means let us help each other to learn.

<sup>22</sup> We had been very interested in members' responses to other documents and translated documents which we had circulated earlier on (these are touched on in Chapters Six and Seven).

responses to such documents. The minutes of the first meeting (quoted verbatim as they were circulated) report the process as follows:

*Cathy explained that the aim of the project was to try to develop a model for informally promoting reading and writing within development projects, like Khayaletu. If the project is successful, then the model can be used in other projects as well. But the idea is to try to use the actual building process as a context for the development of literacy skills.*

*Previously Cathy and Thutu had tried some strategies. The first strategy was to produce the booklet about Khayaletu.... Then they had hoped to work with the expenditure sheets, since in the interviews many people had said that it was difficult to manage these sheets. But they had not been able to do this. They then worked on photographing the house-building, and asking people to tell the story of their building, while writing it down in a book. Some books had been started in this way.*

*They also thought that writing minutes of meetings would be a good way for people to improve their reading and writing. There are other ideas as well, but it would be important to hear from people present what they would like.*

*For the research project it is important that there are a small number of volunteers who would like to be part of this process. Some of these strategies would be used to try to improve reading and writing skills, and after a year an assessment would be made to see if people's skills have increased. But this can be part of a much bigger process to strengthen education and training in Khayaletu, to try to build it into a learning organisation. In addition, the project could be used as a way of documenting the development as it is a very historic and unique process. The children in the project could also be drawn into reading and writing activities. Monde had volunteered, together with Cathy, to organise for donations of reading material, so that a small library could be started at his house.*

*In discussion, Nomathamsanqa said that she was very happy to be part of this process. She would love to be photographed with her children and to write the story of the building. She is aware that the project is a historical and prestigious one, and that it is important to document it and share that with others beyond the project.*

*Sylvia asked if there would be any benefits from writing the stories. Cathy promised that she would not use the stories in any way without consulting with people. Any decisions about what to do with the stories needed to be made jointly by the people who had prepared them. It may be possible if people wanted to produce a small booklet from them, but it is unlikely that any benefit from that would come to people individually. Nomathamsanqa said that she did not need individual benefit, it is enough benefit to carry the story abroad, and she is proud of the project itself and carries the story close to her heart. (Masifundisane Minutes 1/05/00)*

It was at this point that one member asked the poignant but elliptical question "Who is going to heal our misunderstandings?" (not recorded in the minutes).

After the first meeting Somi and I walked with Noma back to her house and asked her if she needed any help in writing her story. She said she had an exercise book and she was going to start writing herself. We left it at that, and over the next week or two Nomathamsanqa wrote her story in Xhosa in a small school exercise book covered in wrapping paper in a ball point pen. Apparently she wrote it in her

bedroom at night by the light of a candle, and explained to me that when she woke up at night she used to read her Bible but “now I get up and I write”. I learned later that she had also written a kind of draft and was shown this in another exercise book, interspersed with a few shopping lists and random household notes. When first shown to me the story was about ten pages long.

### 3. Reading the problem (15<sup>th</sup> May – 7<sup>th</sup> June)

A few days later I was back on site and was shocked to hear that Noma's story was being read by “everyone” and that people were “coming from all over to read it”. I immediately went to Noma's house and asked her what was happening and if I could see it. She took it out and as she read the story to me I could see that there was no sense of pride in the project, only an overwhelming sense of the anger and anguish that she had had to endure living in the house for so long. As she read she gestured again to me the places where the gaps were and the roof leaked. Some neighbours came in, peered over her shoulder at the book, looked at the problems with the house and tried to calm her down.

A few days later I was called to meet with two members (Monde and Thandiwe) who had been part of the Management Committee but who had become inactive with the consolidation of the power of the three amigos. These two members, apparently in discussion with others, had decided that Nomathamsanqa needed to take her story to a provincial meeting of the national organisation and read it out<sup>23</sup>.

A few days later again I was told that everyone was reading the story, that “this thing had spread all over” and that “everyone is coming and looking at her house and at the problems”. Nomathamsanqa said that:

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<sup>23</sup> This discussion gave rise to considerable anxiety on my part, as I had maintained that my project would work within the organisational logic of HASSOC in general. I was worried that such initiatives might jeopardise my project.

*This writing is good, because now everyone can see my problem. Even at night now when I wake up I used to worry and then read my Bible, now when I wake up I want to write and I look for that book and light the candle and then I write.*

In discussions over the following few days with Monde and other members, I was told that the story was “powerful” and that it contained a critique of the organization for the way it had dealt with her and her house. One day in the yard outside Noma’s house I met a man who had come from a group working in house-building about ten kilometers away. He told me that he had come to Tndv because he had heard about the story and wanted to see it. He was waiting to see her so that he could “read her story and see the problems”. He said it was “very wrong that she has these problems”.

All of this took place inside Nomathamsanqa’s house, or outside in the open area between her house and Monde’s house and the street in front of the two houses or in the undemarcated areas behind the newly built houses.



Figure 4.2: Noma’s house with some of the problems visible, area above the wall and below the roof not filled in, no ridge piece, bad workmanship above door and window.

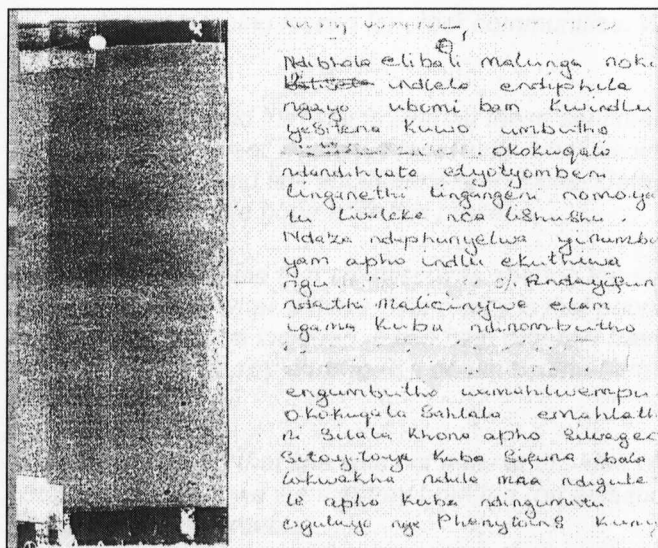


Figure 4.3: First page of Noma's story

#### 4. Negotiating the problem (7<sup>th</sup> June)

In the meantime the Masifundisane group had another meeting to talk about the writing of stories. The minutes showed that some anxiety was expressed about stories and possible critiques of the organisation, and that maybe there was a need for some “guidelines” about how to write. Another member said that there are tensions but that rules may not help and that we should be free. The minutes, as usual recorded in detail by myself and Somi (Nonthutu had already left the project) and translated for the purposes of circulating more widely, state:

*(Cathy) was also wondering how people could be encouraged to work on the writing of their stories. How can we actually start this process?<sup>24</sup>*

*Mam'uKani asked whether when people are writing their stories are they only going to focus on the actual building in the story? Cathy said that she felt it was very important that people started from before and focused on the struggle for land. Getting to (their site) was an important victory, and it would be great if there was some record of this process. But she did not want to force these ideas on people, and it was important that people felt that they could write about whatever they wanted to.*

*Mam'uNtsobo said that perhaps people needed some guidelines about what to write because they didn't want a situation where their stories caused problems for the organisation. People have been through many difficult times and have suffered. Albertina said that maybe people do feel reluctant, and that they need some guidance. Maybe there are ground rules on the (organisation) how much to write about. Yes, we have been through bitter times and now we are scared about what is to be written.*

*Tat'uKhanyile said that yes we are members of the (organisation), and this is the second phase of the (organisation's) programme, but rules may not help with the tensions, what is important is that*

<sup>24</sup> I'm not quite sure why I put it this way, when obviously Noma had already started that process. I think that there was some ambivalence about Noma and her story, and perhaps some members feared that it might jeopardise the development.



*we produce a learning lesson for other communities. We can have our own ways of doing this, but we should be free.*

*Mam'uNtanjana said that she is sharing these sentiments, and that we should go ahead, and say that besides no swear words we must write what we want to write. She herself would like to go onto the radio station, and talk about her experiences. Cathy said that that was exactly the kind of outcomes she would hope from this process.*

*Nomathamsanqa said that she also was sharing the sentiments, and that she had problems with the idea of sifting what is there. The reality is that people have been through joyful and bitter times and these should be included. It can help others. **I have finalised my story now, now I am waiting for the happy ending.** If it doesn't come I am about to do something. But I am happy to say whatever.*

*Mam'uNtsobo said that she was not against the idea of not writing anything, but we must be careful, because if we went astray from the (organisation), then we could expose the (organisation) and get them into trouble.*

*Somi said that she was sure we could work out a way to be careful and edit the material. It was a matter of choosing your words. Cathy said that what was important for her was a sense of accountability. Anything that went public should be taken first to the Management Committee. MamaMkosi agreed about choosing the right phrases.*

### 5. Hearing the problem (14<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> June)

The next steps involved Nomathamsanqa's story being taken to an area meeting at HASSOC and then to the provincial meeting (this was an organisational layer in between the local and the national structures) where apparently "people were worried about the story". This was done, Noma read out the story at the meeting and the response was sympathetic, although no decisions were taken. A week or so later, Noma was later asked to go to the national meeting in the same venue where she was asked to tell the story again (not to read it this time). At that meeting a decision was made that her house needed to be re-built and arrangements were put in place for financial contributions to be made by different branches of HASSOC to contribute to the costs of the rebuilding. As far as I know the discussions and decisions taken at these two meetings were not discussed with the three amigos, who played no role in "righting the wrong".

### 6. Materialising the solution (June and July 2000)

The next time I saw Nomathamsanqa (about two weeks later) she was busy moving into a vacant house so that her house could be rebuilt. She seemed to have lost the depressed demeanor that she had carried for so long, and looked

radiant and energetic. The provincial leader of HASSOC had decided that in addition to the alterations the house needed to be plastered inside. This was a real bonus for Nomathamsanqa who had anticipated that she would need to save for another year or so before she herself could undertake such an improvement.

Monde told me later that “people had always thought that Nomathamsanqa was someone that couldn’t *say anything*, but now they have seen this book and now they have respect for her”. The irony of this is that I had watched over many months as Nomathamsanqa tried to raise her problems verbally in meetings but was never listened to, her spoken words never had any effect.

### **Crossing space and time: Multi-sited micro-ethnography**

The ethnographic approach I took enabled me to observe and take part in (as well as, at times, initiate) a multitude of events. In tracing sequences of events across physical venues and stretches of time I was able to observe them literally unfold. As I noted in Chapter Three, I realised that much socio-linguistic research focuses on one-off interactions, making inferences about the antecedent and subsequent events (if these are seen by the researchers as being at all germane to the interaction). In addition, as expressed in the previous chapter, ethnographic work often occurs in bounded sites – the concept of multi-sited ethnography is a fairly recent one.

The notions of contextualisation cues and indexicality have been important in overcoming some of these limitations through pinpointing empirical data which leads to an understanding of how such cues both pre-suppose and entail surrounding events and practices. Bloome et al (2005) refer a number of times to the importance of studying segments of lessons or lessons across time, in order to create descriptions of power relations and how they are established, changed,

maintained or transformed (p172), but most of their data focuses on single lessons. In their Chapter Three, they identify what they call “three events” within one lesson and analyse the relations between these events, but all the other data in the book deals with different, discrete groups of participants in different, discrete, one-off lessons. The three events analysed in Chapter Three of their book, however, took place in the same space with the same participants, obviously the events are somewhat differentiated on a timescale since they took place sequentially over the period of one lesson. These authors deal at length with the issue of “boundaries” of events, stating that researchers face the problem of the determination of boundaries, and that there are similar problems in the analysis of text. They argue that the problem faced by researchers is similar to the problem faced by the people in the event; they need to know what the boundaries are so that they can understand what is happening and how to construct meaning. Wortham (2005) has recently extended his work in this direction in a study of classroom events, with data collected as snapshots periodically over a year, leading to a deeper understanding of the construction of identity in one particular child in the class across time. In this case then, space and participant frameworks can be seen as roughly similar across these snapshots, i.e. they happened in the same classroom space, with the same teacher and student group.

The data that I have chosen to analyse involves meaning making across groups of events that are distinguished in terms of space and participant framework, as they unfold over time. As I started to analyse the data that make up this chapter<sup>25</sup>, I realised the value of being able to physically trace one event to another, coming to literally move with the participants as they crossed space and time (Burawoy, 1998:12) and in line with Burawoy’s second principle about reflexive science I was

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<sup>25</sup> This relates to what I think of as the level of ‘granularity’ of data. My data was coarser, ‘chunked’ at a somewhat higher level, than much socio-linguistic research, and spanning longer periods of time.

starting to be able to “aggregate” “situational comprehension” into an understanding of “process.”

So in this chapter of my involvement and in the subsequent analysis and writing, I sat with Noma in her house as she wept and told me of her experiences. I tried to reconcile this with the triumphal narratives I had been hearing about participatory development in earlier meetings. I then happened to be present in the early meetings where she raised her problems verbally. This is the point at which I begin the analysis of her trajectory. A little later I initiated the story-writing process. I did not even know whether Noma would come to these meetings, nor how she would interpret my suggestion about stories; perhaps I imagined that writing might simply have played a cathartic role for people in the group. It was a risky strategy, knowing the high levels of tension and lack of trust (expressed in the comment about “healing the misunderstandings”). I was shocked when Monde explained to me about (and I witnessed) the public story reading process that was taking place. I was even more surprised when I was summonsed by Monde and Thandiwe and told that Noma was going to read her story out at the HASSOC meeting. But I was starting to see how these events were linking themselves sequentially into a process. This fragile process crossed from the tense meetings in the garage a few months earlier; to the candlelight writing and the haphazard neighbourhood readings; to the quite formal provincial and national meetings; to the final rebuilding of the house back at Khayaletu. Each of these moves was made up of many small events, but I could not obviously observe or record all of these. As I later started piecing together this trajectory from the data I started to see the potential for studying the processes whereby people act to change their lives, projecting meanings beyond their immediate contexts.

There is a degree of arbitrariness to my selection of the particular moment at which the trajectory begins and ends. I do not regard this as a problem, as long as there is sufficient data to analyse the meaning making process across at least two changes of context. Bauman and Briggs suggest that:

It helps... if one has good data on successive points in the process, but examination even of apparently isolated texts may be productive precisely because a text may carry some its history with it (1990:75).

My focus was different from what Bauman and Briggs are suggesting in that I was not focusing on the text-artifact primarily but on the extextualisation process and the text-artifact thus produced. Most of the events in the sequences presented above, therefore, can be seen to greater or lesser extents as literacy events. But I was not easily able to apply my understandings of the term “literacy practices” or “communities of practice” to what I was seeing. This process was not illuminating “practice”, it was far too raw, dynamic and emergent. I was aware that the house-building process was taking place under extreme material constraints and pressures, and was connected with a basic human need – the need for shelter. Furthermore, the historical period (South Africa, a few years after the demise of apartheid and a few years into the building of a democratic society) was characterised by great fluidity in a wide range of social processes, openness to social experimentation as well as high expectations and demands from the poor.

In the following section I will extract particular sequences of events and explore these in relation to the four NLS problems. I use this exploration to propose ways of addressing these problems, suggesting that the elements thus derived act as units of analysis which, in later chapters, I combine to make up a language of description for studying meaning making as it crosses time and space.

## **Problem One: Flows as sequences of events versus singular events**

This chapter presents a flow of events designed with intention and purpose towards a goal: Noma's attempt to put right the problems with her house and the injustice she felt she had experienced. This goal-orientated activity is a meaning making process. But meaning making does not just flow like water in a river. Rather it flows like water in a river entering a canal and going through a system of locks. It pools, and is contained, it is locked and it is released, echoing Harvey's words (1996:81, stated in Chapter Three) that "flows often crystallise into things, elements, isolable domains or systems which assume a relative permanence." In Chapter Three I explored this in terms of the concept of reification.

Noma's process was clearly a ***flow of events***, which was made up of smaller sequences of events, some of these were repetitive and regular in time but others were totally unique. Methodologically, I asked myself how I should group these and what would distinguish a flow from an event? How then would it be possible to ask what would distinguish 'text' from 'discourse'? How did this link back to my questions about participation and reification? Or membership and naturalisation?

In order to do this, a conceptual shift was needed, away from just literacy towards meaning making more generally, and towards Noma's meaning making process in particular. Once meaning making became central I could then pinpoint what was important within each context and what carried across contexts. I have broken this multitude of events into six sequences, roughly distinguished by the fact that each represented a shift of the meaning making across space and participant framework.

### **Re-visiting the sequences**

The first sequence described above ("speaking the problem") was composed of at least four different events (basically the different General meetings at which Noma

tried to raise her problem verbally). In each meeting the physical space was therefore the same, as was the participant framework. At the scale at which I analyse this data, the events were almost identical and repetitive<sup>26</sup>. In the diagram below these events are A, B, C and D. Given that reading and writing were not much in evidence in these four events, it would involve stretching the concept to say that these were literacy events. So the question could be asked why am I including them? What relevance did they have? If these events could not be seen as literacy events could I make any inferences about literacy practices? I will return to these questions below.

The next sequences included (2) “writing the problem”; (3) “reading the problem” and (4) “negotiating the problem”. These involved Noma raising her problem in a different space and participant framework: the informal neighbourhood gatherings that made up the story-writing process that I had initiated. This was then followed by numerous informal events and interactions in and around Monde and Noma’s house, with few regular or organised time slots. Although the space can be seen as one (Monde’s and Noma’s houses and the in-between house, plus the spaces around them), these events did not all take place in identical participant frameworks each time. I have therefore grouped them into three sequences. In the diagram below these events are E, F, G, H, I, J, K and L. (There were more, but they were all similar).

The fifth sequence (“hearing the problem”) involved shifting the issue to the three meetings at the HASSOC community hall; the local meeting, the provincial meeting and the national meeting. Noma’s problem was raised as an agenda item in each case. The space was the same for all three meetings and participant

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<sup>26</sup> Of course at a more micro scale of linguistic analysis they would not be identical, as any activity changes over time, even from second to second.

frameworks were similar, but not identical. In the diagram below these are M, N and O.

The sixth sequence involved the re-building of Noma's house, and it took place, obviously, at her house. These are P, Q, R, S and so on.

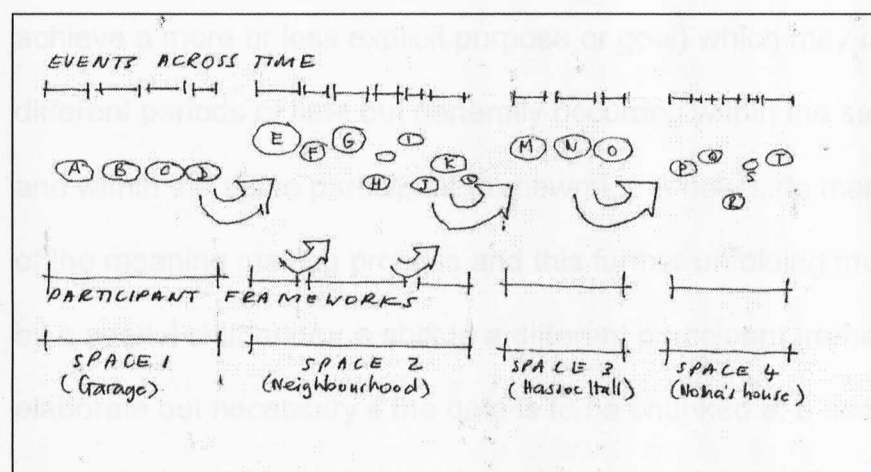


Figure 4.4: Groupings of events and points at which meaning making shifts across space and participant framework

(1) "Speaking the problem" (A,B,C and D)	(2), (3) and (4) "Writing, reading and negotiating the problem" (E) (F,G,H,I,J,K) (L)	(5) "Hearing the problem" (M,N and O)	(6) "Materialising the solution" (P,Q,R,S and so on)
Specialised space – the Garage (reserved only for these meetings). Participant framework stabilised in these meetings, with hierarchical relations (between 25 and 40 Khayaletu members plus the three amigos). Range of participants and roles played - almost identical. Meetings followed identical formats. Strict control exercised by the three amigos. Silencing of participatory development discourse.	Multi-functional, overlapping spaces – the neighbourhood. Varying participant frameworks, characterised by horizontal relations (friends, neighbours and interested individuals) rather than hierarchical. Three amigos absent. Reinvoking of participatory development discourse.	HASSOC Community Hall, innovative space used for many different purposes - children's crèche, savings club meetings, provincial and national meetings. Participant frameworks for three meetings similar (between 40 and 100 members plus HASSOC officials). Roles similar. Participatory development discourse evident.	Noma's house. Participant framework made up of builders interacting with provincial leader.

Figure 4.5: : Summary of features differentiating sequences



### *A basis for grouping sequences: strips*

Given the similarities and distinctions between the elements comprising the sequences of events described I have grouped these into what I have called *strips*, drawing on but differing from Goffman (see footnote 3 in Chapter One). I use the term to refer to a sequence of meaning making events (undertaken in order to achieve a more or less explicit purpose or goal) which may be separated by different periods of time but generally occurring within the same physical space, and within the same participant frameworks. A new strip marks a further unfolding of the meaning making process and this further unfolding must be characterised by a spatial shift and/or a shift to a different participant framework. This is elaborate but necessary if the data is to be chunked at a coarser level, otherwise my analysis could simply have been lost in the detail of the numerous events as they unfolded.

Each time a new strip unfolds there is a recontextualisation of meaning. I use the term 'strip' with caution. While being aware of the ways in which my usage of it is both similar and different from Goffman's, the main reference for me in the choice of this term is the well-known genre of the 'comic strip', which presents its content in small staged sequences, so for example a comic strip in a daily newspaper can present four frames each day within one mini-strip, but the story continues the next day. The designer has projected the meaning over and the reader carries the meaning over, from day to day. Now my usage of the term does not mean that there is any internal, emic 'scripting' of the flow of these strips as they become trajectories. Everyday life, especially as it was in Khayaalethu, is utterly contingent. The approach that I develop here, is an attempt to pin down contingency in order that it can be studied and that a warrant for claims can be found. I am therefore applying the concept of strip as an etic concept, its value comes from the fact that

it captures a sequence that can stretch across space and/or time, that it 'connects' or 'covers' analytically<sup>27</sup>, and that this sequence leads to a further sequence.

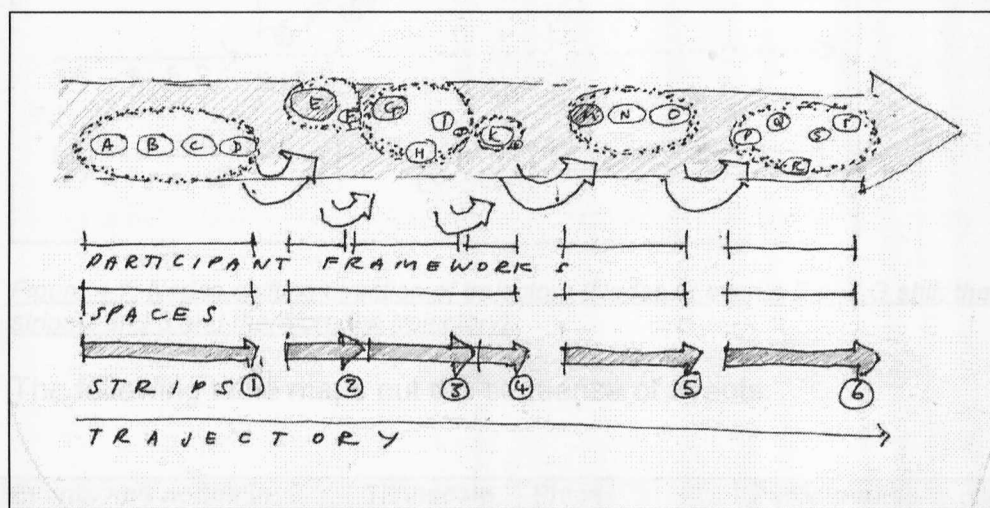


Figure 4.6: Grouping of events defined as strips (key events are shaded)

Some of the moments at which the recontextualisation of meaning making occurs can be seen as nodes. While this concept is more fully developed in the next chapter, for the moment I will use it to capture the idea that a **crossing** takes place at a node. I will explore this in later chapters by drawing on the idea of projection. An event does not have to be a node, however. The node comes into being the first time new mediational means are drawn on, which have an aptness for expressing the crossing. The node in strip 2 was the moment when Noma grasped the opportunity presented to write her story (events E and F). The events that followed from that node enabled the path of the strip to branch in a novel way. In strip 3 (event G) another node emerged as the public reading process began and the numerous neighbourhood reading events followed. This node again enabled the path of the strip to branch out offering new possibilities. In strip 5, the public reading of the story provided another node. The following diagram is an attempt to represent this visually, using the vertical axis to show how the nodes enabled the strip to shift direction:

<sup>27</sup> Something like a band-aid strip!

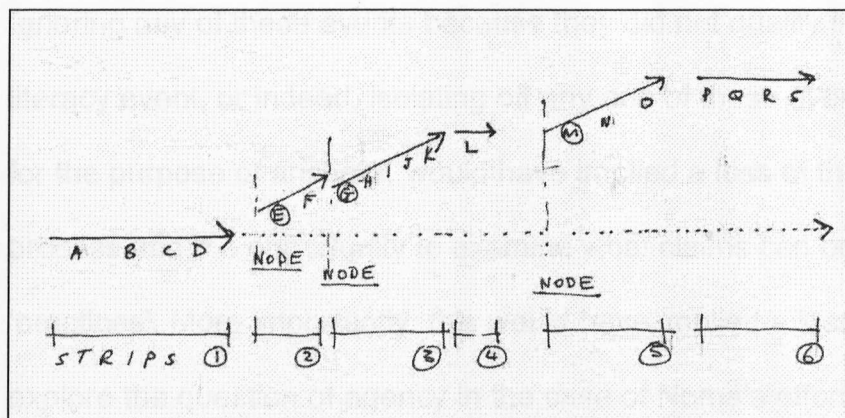


Figure 4.7: Nodes shifting direction of trajectory (Nodes at events E and G shift the direction of strips 2 and 3 and therefore the trajectory)

The following table maps out the sequence of events:

Events and nodes in strips	Timescale	Place	Participants
1. <u>Speaking the problem</u> Community meetings. Noma raises problem verbally.	Four months	The garage	MC, Noma, between 25 and 40 Khayaletu members
2. <u>Writing the problem</u> Literacy group meeting. Discussion about story writing. NODE: Noma offers to start writing story. -Noma writes story at home (this is a node)	Two weeks	The immediate neighbourhood	Ten General members, Cathy, fieldworker, Noma
3. <u>Reading the problem</u> NODE: Numerous neighbourhood based readings of story Events around decision taken to read the story at HASSOC meeting	Three weeks	The immediate neighbourhood	Noma, neighbours, more distant others
4. <u>Negotiating the problem</u> -Literacy group meeting. Discussion of how to manage 'critical' stories. Noma asserts her independence.	One meeting	The immediate neighbourhood	Noma, friends and neighbours from Khayaletu, Cathy and fieldworker.
5. <u>Hearing the problem</u> Local and Provincial meetings of HASSOC. NODE: Noma reads out story, discussion in meeting. National meeting. Noma tells story, discussion and decision to rebuild.	Three meetings spread over three weeks	The community hall in adjacent area	Noma, members of provincial structure, Khayaletu members, national members
6. <u>Building the solution</u> Rebuilding of house	One month	Noma's house	Builders working on instructions of provincial leader, Noma

Figure 4.8: Elements in the 'Writing a Wrong' trajectory

Ignoring any of these events because they did not qualify in the definition of literacy event, or indeed, isolating off any one of these events as a literacy event for the purpose of analysis, would have implied a loss of the meaning of the overall process and the opportunity to examine what claims can be made about 'practices'. More importantly, this would have implied a loss of the opportunity to explore the question of agency in the case of Noma's efforts. I have therefore grouped the sequences of events into strips (identifying which of these are nodes), and the sequences of strips together into what I have called a "trajectory", drawing on, but also diverging from the use of the concept of "text trajectory" by Blommaert (2005).

In this thesis therefore, a trajectory is a composite of sequential strips making up a particular meaning-making process. In this case the trajectory is called (with a touch of poetic license) "writing a wrong."

### **Problem Two: The boundaries of context and the problem with making inferences about literacy practices**

I have established the way in which sequences of events could be grouped into strips and then into trajectories, and I have identified nodes in redirecting the paths of the strips and therefore of the overall trajectories. I explored dimensions that came into particular configurations for each strip, holding the meaning making process stable for each strip and therefore contributing to the overall meaning of the trajectory. The events in this trajectory were undertaken by participants in particular relationships with each other, acting and reacting within particular spaces.

What added weight, however, to the interpretation of each strip was having the knowledge of what had come before and what was to follow. This knowledge was gained through the literal process of following participants through time and space.

In previous work I would have tried to make some inferences about literacy practices based on what was evident in the events as well as the broader contextual knowledge I would have gained through ethnography. My inferences about practices would have been based on the definition available which is that a literacy practice is a “broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (Street, 2003: 2).

However, in a thoughtful exploration of these concepts, Bloome et al (2005:7) suggest that for Street, “event” is an empirical manifestation, the bit observed from which social and cultural practices are inferred and conceptualised. While this approach is central to much work in socio-linguistics and linguistic anthropology the authors point out that the concept is less useful in “focusing attention on what and how people in interaction with each other create, accomplish, adapt, adopt, reproduce, transform etc the social and cultural practices extant within a particular social scene” (ibid:6). The authors also point out, however, that the approach generally taken treats events as the “empirical space” in which practices come into play with each other and that people are conceptualised as agents of those practices, but also therefore as “captured by those literacy practices and by the discourses within which those practices are embedded”. They suggest an alternative theorisation of the events as spaces in which people act on their circumstances, on and with the literacy practices that are given and available. In this case the conception of literacy exists not in “some background abstraction or shared cognitively held model but in its **doing** then people are conceptualised as creators and actors” (my emphasis). This leads to a conceptualisation of literacy practices less as:

...shared cognitively held cultural models and more as semiotic resources.... conceptualised from within the event by participants through their individual and collective histories interacting with each other, with

others in related and pertinent situations and including and within the material environments in which they live (Bloome et al, 2005:6).

Bloome et al define an event as a bounded series of actions and reactions that people make in response to each other at the level of face-to-face interaction (ibid:5). In this light, the basic analytic unit is people (not individuals) – people are the context for each other. So an important step in this thesis has been to locate the people making such actions and reactions in bounded ways within what I have seen as participation frameworks, as described in Chapter Three.

Bloome et al's definition is a valuable advance, but I would like to further stress the concept of action (and of agency), and the way in which action creates and recreates context. I have therefore focused on the centrality of the actor, in this case, of Noma, and her object – addressing problems with her house. With this focus on the actor and the activity, I have found it helpful to analyse the notions of nodes, strips and trajectories from an activity theoretical perspective, and in particular, to embed them within Engestrom's "activity systems", as discussed in Chapter Three.

As explained in Chapter Three, Engestrom conceptualises activity systems as being comprised of the agent or actor and the action undertaken towards an object via some kind of mediational means, artifacts or tools. But he adds further relevant elements - the division of labour, rules and community. With this framework I found myself no longer looking for regularities and shared models, and could look for ways of understanding emergent and contingent actions grouping into processes. But I still needed to understand the level at which the concept of activity system could be applied, in order not to fall into the same problem that I had experienced with the concept of communities of practice (and explained in Chapter Three). These were firstly, the perception of these as needing to be defined emically without making *a priori* judgements; and secondly, this linked with

a question about boundaries i.e. where such communities would begin and where they would end, who would be “in” and who would be “out”.

The analytical level at which the concept of activity systems is pitched therefore, is the level of the *strips* identified above. Grouping activities, in this sense, into strips and differentiating between strips on the basis of changes of participant frameworks and space enables a larger, less granular unit of analysis to become focal. The analysis therefore is not pitched at the level of each detailed event but at the level of groups of events which have been “chunked” as strips according to the actor’s intention and the context in which that intention was expressed i.e. the activity system. In the case of Noma’s trajectory therefore, the same meaning was carried across different activity systems.

In the following, each strip is viewed as a different activity system<sup>28</sup>. I make this claim on the basis that each strip was located and differentiated from other strips according to participant frameworks and space. The actor or agent (Noma) and the object or outcome (rectifying the problems with a house) were the same. I conceptualise the participant framework within the activity system as the actor, acting towards a goal, in relation to others. Engestrom’s term for the others is Community. Community, as explained in Chapter Two is a loaded term.

‘Community’ needs to be established emically, and without detailed research, claims for community cannot be made. Boer et al (2002) suggest the use of the term “actors involved”, I prefer the use of the term participants, and the idea that the relation between participants, division of labour and rules generates a participant framework within the activity system. The participants are sub-groups or individuals who perceive and perhaps share the general object or goal of the activity and because of their participation in aspects of the activity at particular

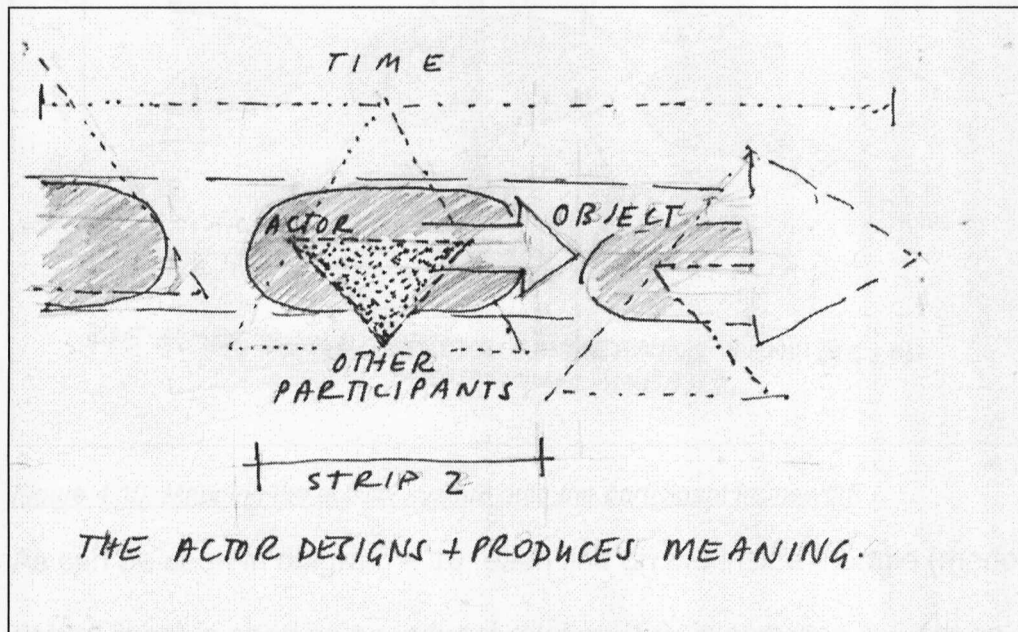
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<sup>28</sup> This is not necessarily always the case.



times and places, differentiate themselves from other groups. This is not clear-cut, as Lemke (2000:288) states:

The original logic of Leontiev's Activity Theory defined the continuity or unity of extended activity by the maintenance of a goal or object of activity. One can argue that in many forms of social activity, goals are emergent, they change during the development of the project. They are also in collective activity, not necessarily common or shared amongst participants; different goals are just successfully enough articulated to permit collective activity to proceed for the most part coherently.



*Figure 4.9: Mapping the participant framework onto strip 2*

The kinds of activities undertaken in the activity systems are discursive ones, and these are 'governed' by rules, which I see as largely discursive. As outlined in Chapter Two, this research is informed by a Foucauldian perspective on discourse, in which discourse is seen as defining and producing the objects of our knowledge, regulating people's conduct and informing the way in which they put their ideas into practice. What can be communicated or not communicated relates closely to the mediating artifacts or tools, which provide the means for articulation. Division of labour provides a useful way of periodising the social relationships in the activity system and locating these in relation to the specialisation of identity.



Finally, and crucial to the argument in this thesis, the mediational means need to be considered in each strip and these are crucial in establishing the concept of the node. (This is elaborated further below and in Chapter Five).

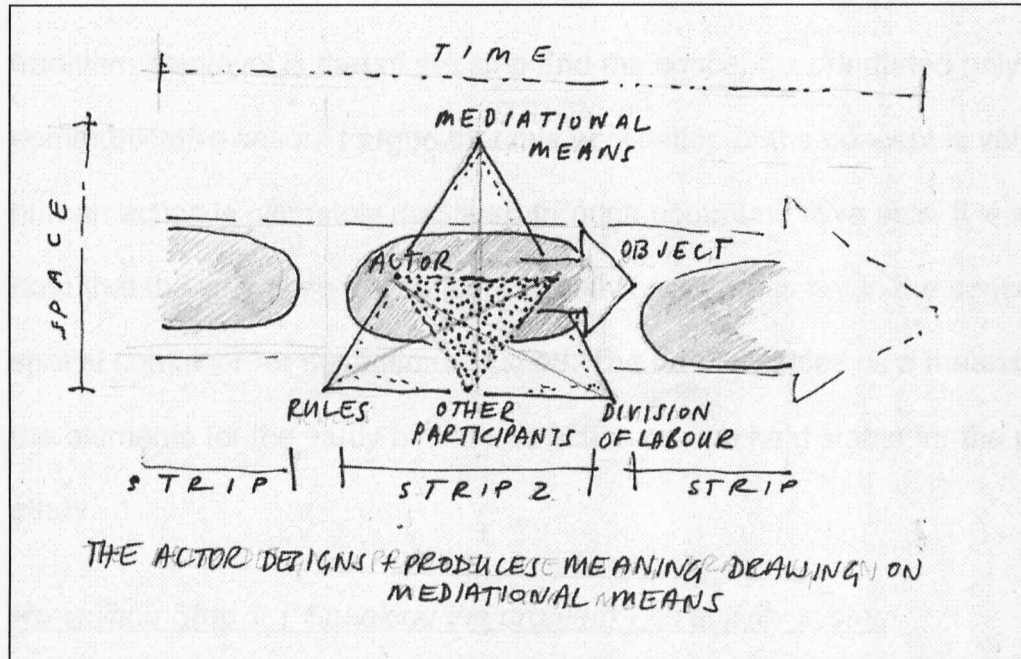


Figure 4.10: Mapping the activity system onto the participant framework

As can be seen in diagram 4.10, each line on the inside triangle (made up of dotted lines) is seen as an indirect relation (this is common in work on activity systems) as it is, of necessity, mediated by each of the outside points of the triangle: the mediational means, the rules and the division of labour. The inside triangle is conceptualised in this thesis as the participant framework, but to meet the purposes of my research each relation between the actor, the other participants and the object is mediated by the means (tools, artifacts), rules and division of labour<sup>29</sup>. Each of these elements can change independently of the others and each changes as the activity system changes.

<sup>29</sup> As explained previously, the concept of participant framework has only been applied to spoken interactions, and therefore the question of mediation via other means, is less central. In exploring the value of the concept of activity system, I wondered whether "mediated participant framework" may have been better. The concept of system is simply a little too "systematic" for my purposes. However, given that the concept is so widely used and well-known, and so many elements within it were valuable for my study, I opted to stay with it but qualify its usefulness at points.

Each of these elements therefore become locked into a particular configuration for each strip, this configuration is captured in the concept of activity system. I use 'activity system' therefore as a heuristic, choosing to apply it in a more granular sense, more micro-level, than Engestrom or other writers in the socio-cultural tradition. The level is that of the strip and the concept is orientated only towards communicative action. I argue that this application of the concept is valid, since all human action is ultimately mediated through communicative acts. It is important to note that the way I use the concept of activity system is not in the sense of a spatial container for the actions studied. The heuristic itself, is a means whereby the elements for the study of situated action can be held stable for the purposes of study.

#### *Re-visiting Strip 1: ("Speaking the problem") as activity system*

Khayaletu's "General", as outlined in the narrative above, can be seen as an activity system. Strip 1 occurred during the middle phase of my observation period at Khayaletu. The participation framework in the meetings of the General, at this stage, consisted of strict routinised meeting procedures, led by the Chair and regulated through turn-taking. The mediational means in this activity system were:

- The dominant mode of communication was verbal (only Xhosa spoken)
- A limited range of gestural forms could be drawn on (raising of hands in order to speak)
- Minutes were written in a minutes book in Xhosa but these were seldom reproduced, circulated or referred to again, an agenda was agreed on verbally at the start and was sometimes referred to, to keep order
- Turn-taking was strictly regulated by the chair and limited to a small number of participants.

Although paperwork was central in the house-building process (plans, invoices, bank statements, expenditure sheets, savings books and so on) interactions with paperwork almost never took place in these meetings. This was reserved for the three amigos in interaction with members of HASSOC, the SO and FSO, the

engineers and architects and so on<sup>30</sup>. Proceedings of the 'General' usually consisted of verbal report backs, followed by discussion. The division of labour<sup>31</sup> therefore (which had settled over a fairly short period of time in this activity system) was hierarchical, with strict control being exercised by the three amigos in top-down fashion. Management of house building processes verged on the coercive. The rules were constructed within this division of labour, and there was a general silencing of debate and critique, accompanied by muffled allegations of financial corruption. The discourse of participatory development was seldom articulated in these meetings.

*Revisiting Strips 2, 3 and 4: (Writing, reading and negotiating the problem) as activity system*

I have grouped these strips together for the purposes of discussion. Strip 2 gave rise to a very different activity system, and I was fully 'implicated' in its emergence. Although the original academic project proposal had stated that "interventions must be undertaken within the logic of the development process and the organisational culture"(Kell, 1997), Masifundisane can be seen as a micro activity system operating within the broader ones, and spilling over into the neighbourhood more generally<sup>32</sup>.

Nonthutu, Somi and I were outsiders, I was the only 'white', English-speaking person involved. We had not made any special effort to invite the three amigos. Although I had initiated the process, I was clear that I should not direct it in any way (this can be seen in the minutes of the meetings). Two General members had volunteered to help us with our efforts (Monde and Nomsa) and another ten or so

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<sup>30</sup> This was one of the reasons why it was so difficult for the work of the funded project to really engage with literacy practices on site. Gate-keeping was all-pervasive.

<sup>31</sup> Footnote 37 provides data for this claim.

<sup>32</sup> At one meeting, we were in the middle of discussions when suddenly everyone leapt up and launched themselves out of the room, like huge birds moving off a rock and alighting somewhere else. It took a few minutes and an explanation from Monde to help me understand that it had started pouring and people were rushing to get their washing off the lines. Needless to say we did not continue with the meeting!

people from the immediate neighbourhood came along (made up of the first twenty houses that had been built and the second forty that were nearing completion, but including other members who had not yet started building but spent much of their time on site).

The mediational means in this activity system can be described as follows:

- The dominant mode of communication in the two meetings was verbal, but verbal interactions were focused on literacy. Obviously the writing of the story was central. In the meetings there was a mix of Xhosa and English, with regular, informal translating. The public reading process was obviously centred on reading, but this was completely integrated with speech.
- The gestural was important in the public reading of the story as Noma pointed to the problems with her house, again this was integrated with speech as the problems were shown and discussed.
- As indicated earlier, Nonthutu, Somi and I made a careful effort to introduce written texts where appropriate. We circulated a photocopied invitation to the first meeting (in English and Xhosa). We had a rough form of translation of the discussion from Xhosa into English for my benefit. We wrote up the minutes immediately after the meeting (in English and Xhosa) and circulated them back to the members who had attended, asking these members to circulate them more widely within Khayaalethu.
- Anybody could take part in both the meetings as the wider public reading process demonstrated. All of these interactions were dense, complex and spatially concentrated.

#### Revisiting Strip 5 ("hearing the problem") as activity system

Strip 5 involved the structures of the provincial and national association, consisting of elected officials and representatives of local branches. Although I did not attend the meetings at which Noma presented her story I had attended numerous similar meetings of these structures and can assume that the formats were similar. They were attended by 40 – 100 people representing their areas, and were run by the elected members of both the provincial and national committees. Meetings had a degree of formality with a Chair and minute taker, and people would often call the meeting to order if speakers shifted from the agenda.

There was often full translation between English or Afrikaans and Xhosa. Meetings could be interrupted by song or prayer, or impassioned short speeches by

members around controversial issues. Agendas but not minutes were sometimes circulated prior to meetings, but minutes, lists, memos etc were often referred to during proceedings. The walls of the hall were covered in large newsprint charts and sheets with issues, lists, diagrams, written in felt tip pens in both English and Xhosa, and these were often left up on the walls in between meetings. Members often took their own notes at these meetings in discarded school exercise books or diaries from earlier years.

I will not continue with strip 6 as it is less revealing and there is less data on the actual events.

Noma's trajectory wound its way through these different activity systems, and it should be clear that each offered its own affordances for the communicative events in which she was engaging.

### **Problem Three: From linguistics to multi-modality and semiotics**

I have indicated the need to extend the linguistic framework to multimodal and semiotic frameworks (see also, Kell, 2001c; 2006). One of the reasons which drew me to activity theory was the fact that mediational means was a concept that had a long history, rooted in the socio-cultural theories developed by Vygotsky and drawing on the traditions of Marx and Engels with regard to theorising labour. Vygotsky's work was central in developing understandings about language, but the idea has also extended to the use of tools and artifacts. Multimodality is implied in the concept. At the same time, my main interest here is in looking at what this shift enables us to understand about literacy – the possibility that moving outside current frameworks enables us to see our own in new ways.

Mediational means can be defined extremely broadly. I have introduced the discussion of this in Chapter Two focusing on the concept of semiotic resources. I

drew attention to what, in literacy studies, has been called the “four resources model” which involved code-breaking, pragmatic, semantic and critical domains. For the purposes of this thesis I will define mediational means as the codes and modes of communication that are available to both individuals and groups within activity systems and differing across them, together with the media necessary for these modes to be produced and the technologies or tools associated with them. Artifacts may well be produced in communication and these artifacts play a central role in communicative activity. In the written (linguistic) mode of communication, for example, code-breaking, pragmatic, semantic, and perhaps metapragmatic or metadiscursive resources (as the term critical is very loaded) are drawn on, as well as technologies and prior artifacts playing a role in communicating in this mode.

Changes of context (conceptualised at the level of strip and as activity system) imply different mediational means being available or not available. The configuration of the different elements in the activity systems provides opportunities for, or constraints on, the uptake (or lack of it) of these means, offering different affordances for the mode which will best express the meaning participants wish to make, and may involve choosing modes and mixing or switching modes.

Nomathamsanqa, as the actor in this trajectory, ‘designed’ and ‘produced’ (more or less consciously, strategically or instantaneously) communicative events in her attempt to achieve her purpose. In analysing these communicative events I draw on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s strata of communicative practice (2001): discourse, design, production and distribution, as discussed in Chapter Two. These concepts are applied in analysing the actions of the subject in the activity system in order to realise their intention of making meaning. In what follows and in this thesis

generally, I focus on design and production; time and space constraints mean that I will only touch on discourse and distribution.

### *Design and production of communicative activity in Strip 1*

Noma's design and production of the communicative events in this strip occurred simultaneously as both spontaneous 'performance' and as ritualised expression of anguish and grief. She drew on the main mediational means available in that activity system, a verbal presentation, but one that was differentiated from the usual forms of talk in the General. Noma presented her problem as one in which she as an individual was entitled to redress, and that redress was incumbent upon the actions of the MC and by extension the broader Khayaletu community.

Bauman and Briggs' description of performance (1990: 73) is useful here:

...performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. Performance puts the act of speaking on display – objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience. Performance heightens awareness of the act of speaking and licences the audience to evaluate the skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment. By its very nature, then, performance potentiates decontextualisation.

Noma's performance constructed her as the 'client' rather than just the participant; and the three amigos as the 'dispensers'. The performance acted as an appeal from the client to the dispensers. The ordinary members of Khayaletu became the audience of this appeal, and they were constructed as silent witnesses, as those who could potentially mitigate in the severity with which the dispensers would deal with the appeal. It was unclear to me whether the three amigos were consolidating their authority and the arbitrariness of their power by not responding to Noma's appeal, or whether they simply did not know how to address the

problem themselves, perhaps both of these aspects are relevant. Perceptions of Noma's disability may also have been a factor in their responses<sup>33</sup>.

### *Design and production of communicative activity in Strips 2, 3 and 4*

In these strips Noma participated as an ordinary member (participant) rather than as a victim or appellant. It is not at all clear what she herself had in mind as she spoke in the first meeting (event E), but she drew admirably on the participatory development discourse – “the project is a historical and prestigious one”, “it is enough benefit to carry the story abroad”, “she is proud of the project and carries the story close to her heart”. She gave no idea that she would write her story as a critique of the organisation, although the history of her earlier verbal presentations must have been invoked in all of our minds as she spoke. The moment at which she made the decision to take part in the writing of her story constitutes a node, in the definition I have given above, that is, the node enabled the strip to change direction through the introduction of new mediational means, appropriate for the projection of meaning. Noma recognised that these new means available may afford her new ways in which her intentions could be realised. She grasped those and shifted the direction of the strip.

In analysing factors relevant to Nomathamsanqa's design in these strips the concept of genre is helpful. Russell (1997) outlines a theory of genre as operationalised actions “compatible with the systems version of activity theory” (512). He quotes Bazerman (1994) who puts forward the idea that genres are not best described as textual forms but as “forms of life, ways of being, frames for social action” (p1). Russell claims that as “forms of life”:

...genres and the activity systems they operationalise (temporarily) are regularised or stabilised through routinised tool use within and among sub-

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<sup>33</sup> It was exceedingly difficult for me to establish the nature of Noma's disability. It was only about two years later that I realised that a term that she used in her story “Phenytoin” is actually a drug used for epilepsy.



groups. Thus context is an ongoing accomplishment, not a container for actions or texts (1997:513).

Further, Russell (drawing on Y. and R. Engestrom, 1987 and 1995) sees activity systems as made up of “specific goal-directed, time bound, conscious actions, which are, in turn, operationalised by variable mediational means (choices of tools, including genres)<sup>34</sup>”. The importance of this view is that typified actions over time are “stabilised for now” in ways that have proven useful in the activity system as “tool mediated responses to conditions recognised by participants as recurring” (p515). With repeated use such actions may become routine and almost unconscious: “experienced participants in an activity system ordinarily do not need to choose tools each time they take action”, these choices start to appear as “*natural*”.

Apart from my efforts to promote writing in the community over the three or so years that I was involved with Khayaalethu, I had never noticed any attempt to write outside of the day to day tasks that were associated with the house-building process. Personal written accounts of life experiences were not at all evident, I had only observed one person reading a novel once, and on a small number of other occasions people reading the Bible. In 65 questionnaires conducted amongst adult residents, none indicated any reading activities apart from newspapers and childrens’ homework<sup>35</sup>.

However, in retrospect, there were precursors to Noma’s trajectory, which I had not considered at all important at the time. These involved firstly, a small booklet,

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<sup>34</sup> The question may be asked – is a strip not simply a genre, and a trajectory not simply what has been called a genre chain (Fairclough, 2003) ? The answer to this is that a more generic term is necessary if multimodality is to be seriously addressed, and meaning placed centrally i.e. the same reasons for which I have not chosen to use the term “text trajectories”.

<sup>35</sup> One activity that had some success was the setting up of a small library in Monde’s house, involving a donation of about one hundred new children’s books, mostly written in Xhosa and beautifully produced, many from Cambridge University Press. These were loosely catalogued by myself and Monde and housed in his front room. Very quickly they started to be borrowed by the local children, and read and discussed widely. One point worth noting is that a small number of elderly women from the neighbouring highly impoverished shanty-town also started popping in to Monde’s house and borrowing the children’s books to read themselves.

the design and production of which I had initiated at a much earlier stage (about a year before this trajectory). This was a small A4 size folded booklet in which Nonthuthu and I recorded the story of Khayaletu, by eliciting narratives and inserting photographs. A thousand copies of the booklet were produced for a celebratory feast and widely distributed. Photos showed the booklet being widely read and evaluations indicated that it was much enjoyed and discussed, although it was not without controversy<sup>36</sup>. Secondly, Nonthuthu and I had also initiated an earlier attempt at story –writing, by photographing people building their houses, taking the pictures back to people and getting them to talk about what was happening in the photos while we wrote this down. We then gave these back to people and stuck some of them up on the walls of the garage. We abandoned this attempt at a time of great tension in Khayaletu when we had felt that we needed to withdraw from the site. It is possible however, that these two earlier attempts at an intervention did have more of an impact than we anticipated or realised, and maybe did influence Noma’s decision to choose to write her story and her ability to ‘imagine’ what her story may look like and how it may be distributed.

Further, Noma’s verbal performance in strip 1 did “potentiate decontextualisation” as suggested by Bauman and Briggs (1990 and quoted above), in that they lifted out her verbal story from the general proceedings of the meetings. She had had practice in extracting her narrative from context and participation framework in a sense through designing her verbal appeal as ritualised performance. She was

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<sup>36</sup> Many months after the production of the booklet, I introduced a group of adult education students from the UK to Tndv. The three amigos took charge of the visit. At the end, MamaToleni brought out the left-over booklets (of which there were about 300 still packed in their sealed plastic packets). The three amigos insisted that the students take all 300 booklets back to the UK. The students said they would take a handful, but the three amigos insisted that the full packet was taken. In the meantime (and independently of anything to do with the booklet) the students had made a collection of money (about R350 - probably about 35 pounds) which was handed over to the three amigos, under the watchful eyes of a few General members, who had gathered around informally. My understanding was that the money was to be used for a general project. A few weeks later I heard that there was much dissatisfaction amongst General members who felt that the three amigos had been paid to co-ordinate the visit and that the money was in exchange for the booklets i.e. the three amigos had “sold” the booklets and pocketed the money! I was interested in what appeared to be a view of a kind of extreme commodification of the booklet. This was echoed in other attempts that Nonthuthu and I made to produce and distribute texts more widely in Khayaletu, and will be touched on again in Chapter 7.

then able to realise this lifting out in another mode. But the opportunity to do so was provided by the emergent writing activity (basically the Masifundisane intervention initiated by me)<sup>37</sup>.

However, these examples hardly represented routinised, regularised tool use and they felt far from “*natural*”. The naturalisation/reification dynamic discussed in Chapter Three becomes more relevant here, and I argue that the forms of expression of meaning making in this trajectory were reified rather than naturalised. The reification itself indexes the communicative economy at play in and across this trajectory, and I will now explore this further.

Mediational means are conceptualised in this thesis as semiotic resources. These include codes and modes for meaning making, in this case, the linguistic mode involves both spoken and written language. In writing and reading, actors draw on code-breaking resources, and pragmatic and semantic resources. They also draw on the technologies and artifacts necessary for and available in that place at that time for making meaning.

Noma was clearly able to read and write (“code-break”) in Xhosa, she told us she did not need any help. She had written clear drafts of particular sections of the story in a different exercise book, and had then re-written them in the main story. There were parts of the final story where she added in bits, using lines and arrows to indicate where they went.

She also drew on pragmatic and semantic resources. Her assertiveness with regard to her story grew as she seemed to realise that it was ‘being heard’. In a highly strategic move, Noma grasped the opportunity provided by Masifundisane and used it to her own advantage without knowing what the outcome would be. At

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<sup>37</sup> Implications for literacy programmes and the conceptualisation of literacy teaching flow from this, which are beyond the scope of this thesis, but could be the subject of further research.

the same time she did not 'rock the boat' of the first meeting, she 'spoke' the participatory development speak, the heroic narrative of what people had been achieving at Khayaletu against all odds, and she kept quiet about the fact that she knew her story was going to be highly critical. Nomathamsanqa's responses represented a sophisticated strategic response, involving the imagining or picturing of what she was going to do and what it may possibly achieve. In this she realised that I, and the text-artifacts I was trying to promote, were potential leverage in her struggle<sup>38</sup>.

In the second Masifundisane meeting (strip 4) metapragmatic resources were drawn on. What was happening with Noma's story was clearly uppermost in people's minds yet she was the only one to bring it up directly. Other members discussed elliptically the issue of "guidelines", or "choosing words" (as they put it), or "editing" so as not to cause problems. But Noma seemed to be growing in strength and clarity about her own position in writing her story, as she said she had problems with "sifting" what is there, that she had "written her story and now she is waiting for the happy ending". Although the genre of written personal testimony was not established or evident in Khayaletu, the concept of the happy ending certainly was.

The public neighbourhood-based reading of the story (strip 3) is perhaps of greatest interest. Word spread very quickly about the book and Noma was asked to bring it out on many occasions. Reading took place as collective activity. Pairs or groups of people gathered around Noma in her house as she read the story out loud, looking over her shoulder at the words and nodding or tut-tutting as she read. The reading out loud as testimony indexed the physical problems with the house.

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<sup>38</sup> I do not intend to sound 'determinist' here. I believe that Noma did not know herself quite what she was going to do with this writing "opportunity", and I am sure that her utterances were absolutely not intended to deceive. What I am suggesting is that people with access to limited resources have developed strategies for survival, and Noma's utterances represent a relatively unconscious "imagining" of her strategic moves, given her dire circumstances.

As she read, she pointed to the problems, which were then visible both as words and as material form. People then looked at the problems again, they saw the gap between the windows and walls, the absence of the ridge piece, they felt the wind blowing through these gaps, they even felt the rain coming in.

Monde and Thandiwe's response to Noma's text was emergent. They saw an opportunity provided by the reification of the text-artifact into a physical object: a narration and "a story"/ "a book". The silent witnessing of strip 1 was transformed into action as they interpreted the value of her meaning-making process to the developing critique of the three amigos; as well as the value of the reified material object in 'righting the wrong' for Noma. Here they were drawing on resources that were highly specific to the place and time (when and where else can a small hand-scrawled text in a child's exercise book achieve literally concrete resolution to such an intractable problem?). At the same time there was another kind of emergence, the growing emergence of the realisation that Noma was someone who could "say something", by this they meant someone who could "write something", and this increased her power and prestige in the community. Monde told me later that "people had always thought that Nomathamsanqa was someone that couldn't say anything, but now they have **seen this book** and now they have respect for her".

The response to the written story in strip 3 was entirely the opposite from the response to the verbal story in strip 1 (where it was basically ignored). Yet the meaning being conveyed by both texts was almost identical<sup>39</sup>.

Recent work on the use of indexicals (Wortham, in Wortham and Rymes, 2004; Hanks, 1996) can add valuable understandings:

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<sup>39</sup> By way of contrast, in the identification and analysis of a trajectory from my Masters' thesis from events that made up the first diagram (Figure 1.1) (and not included in this thesis) the written articulation of an issue was totally ignored in a meeting in favour of an entirely different set of verbal articulations of the issue.

Cues can signal indexically to point out and sometimes create aspects of the context. Silverstein (1976) distinguishes between two types of indexical relationship that a sign can have with its object. First the sign can indexically presuppose its object. In this type of case it points to an element of the context that exists independent of the occurrence of the sign itself (ibid: 124).

The problems with Noma's house existed independently of her writing about them in her book. But there was no wider uptake of the problems prior to the creation of the book. The fact that the uptake occurred only once the story was written indicates that the writing itself and the "thingy-ness" (Silverstein and Urban, 1996:2) of the story itself are the site of tremendous ideological investments on the part of the participants. Simultaneously, the neighbourhood reading process itself was coming to index Noma's developing identity as a "speaking" person, a person who was able to project her meanings in ways that were highly valued in that place at that time.

### *Design and production of communicative activity in Strip 3*

At the beginning of strip 3, a new node occurred. Nomathamsanqa had been encouraged by members of Khayaletu to physically carry her story across to the provincial meeting in the neighbouring area and to read it out. Noma and her text-artifact created a material connection between strips 2 and 3, and therefore between the two activity systems. Her presence and the materiality of the text in the meetings carried the circumstances of its entextualisation into its recontextualisation. But the entextualisation process and the text-artifact itself had both been reified in the previous strip. In the following chapters I will contrast this reification with other entextualisation processes and text-artifacts, which I claim have become naturalised.

The very "thingy-ness" (Silverstein and Urban, 1996:1) of the story (which had now become an augmented text in that further layers of entextualisation had occurred during the neighbourhood writing and reading) enabled the meaning-making

process to shift beyond the usual meaning-making circuits in Khayaalethu and into another context where different power relations were at play. Again drawing on Wortham (in Wortham and Rymes, 2004:16):

...(t)he sign can indexically create, or in later terminology (eg Silverstein, 1993) “entail” its object. In this type of case the sign points to an element of the context that exists as a result of the particular use of the sign itself.

The book itself pointed to the context it had created as it was recontextualised in strip 3. The entextualisation process was thus an indexical entailment, while in strip 2 the text-artifact was a presupposing indexical. In this way a complex “join” was created (to use Smith’s term, 1999) between the two contexts.

Noma was able to realise her meaning through projecting it into the story and in Wenger’s definition of reification: the story became a “thing”, perceived as existing in the world, as having a reality of its own. Monde’s comments indicate that both the entextualisation process and the text-artifact itself were reified. While the denotational text was important, it was the interactive work around the entextualisation process and the text-artifact itself that seemed to carry a greater weight. This raises questions of ownership, access and competence. I, and others, have tended to argue on the basis of ethnographic research in South Africa, that the importance of the individual ability to encode and decode texts has been overstated (Kell, 1996; 2000; Prinsloo and Kell, 1997). The data in this chapter suggest otherwise<sup>40</sup>.

### **Activity systems and discourse**

How is discourse situated in the framework thus developed? I indicated in earlier chapters that I had previously worked with the concepts of literacy events, literacy practices and the identification of a broad, Foucauldian set of discourses which I

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<sup>40</sup> I will not be able to address this question further in this thesis, but it remains an important issue for further study.

claimed circulated in the sites under study. In order to move from event to practice and to discourse without on the one hand, making *a priori* claims about practices and discourses; or on the other, slipping back into an autonomous model of literacy, I have literally followed actors as they shift their meaning making across time and space, and into new participation frameworks. Activities in these frameworks consist of mediated actions. Mediated by means, rules and the division of labour, they can therefore be seen as activity systems. I will return to the issue of literacy practices in the final chapter, but it is necessary at this stage to address the concept of discourse.

Many of the activities presented in this chapter are discursive ones. These activities take shape on the basis of the means and the rules available, they cannot be extracted from the means and the rules. Rules are therefore discursive rules, while means are material. As mentioned in Chapter Two, discursive rules allow certain things 'to be said or not said'. When certain 'things' are said, but not other 'things', these contribute to the broader circulation of discourses, in the Foucauldian sense.

In applying these concepts to Nomathamsanqa's trajectory I will try to demonstrate the value of exploring the changes that are generated as meaning making crosses the three contexts in the first three strips; what it is that happens in the space between them, as it were. In order to achieve this I need to identify how each is different from the other.

Nomathamsanqa's trajectory occurred towards the end of phase two at the height of the power of the three amigos when proceedings had hardened into fixed routines and rituals. Although there were deep divisions in Tndv and great unhappiness, little of this surfaced directly in the meetings of strip 1. My interpretation was that members were afraid to raise their unhappiness and



criticisms for fear of losing their place on the list for houses. This sequence of meetings was quite distinct from other phases in the history of “the General”<sup>41</sup>.

According to Engestrom, dissensus, resistance, conflicts and deep contradictions are constantly produced in activity systems (in Russell 1997:511). Engestrom has defined contradiction as essential to the dynamic of change, and sees activity systems as “virtual disturbance- and innovation-producing machine(s)” (in Russell 1997, 531). These are often “fundamental dialectical contradictions about the object/motive of an activity system, the direction of collective activity and they require fundamental choices with long-term consequences....which threaten or promise.... a new form of activity” (ibid). The contradiction so apparent in the activity systems within which Noma’s trajectory took place was “participatory development vs. top-down control”.

The contradiction between the participatory development discourse and the hierarchical managerial procedures (which was generally coming to a head at this time) was very evident and at its most severe during strip 1. Noma’s communication in this case was constrained. I argue that the broader contradictions were recognised by the audience in strip 1, but because of the constraints they were not able to realise any form of response to it – they remained silent.

In strip 2 the dominant discourse was that of participatory development and democratic process. Nomathamsanqa recognised that the situation presented her

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<sup>41</sup> I make this claim on the basis of extensive ethnographic data collected over the three different phases of the project, but there is no space to report this data here. I hope to avoid the accusation that I am making a *priori* claims about this process, in the way that these have been made by Blommaert (2001) (I believe, justifiably) about Critical Discourse Analysis, for example. Some brief summarising comments on my data are: Earlier meetings (phase one) were less regular and less differentiated from other events; more permeable, more part of the ongoing texture of life in the organisation. Strict norms governing participation were less obvious. There were frequent comings and goings in the meetings; more bodily movement and cross-play. Phase Two is described in this chapter. In contrast and in the final phase (after the ousting of the three amigos), half to two thirds of the members would participate in discussions; the position of Chair and minute taker would rotate; minute takers could be members who were not on the committee; there was much bodily movement and at times an almost carnivalesque atmosphere would break out with wild gesticulations, people standing up suddenly, teasing, much humour and irony.

with a possibility. The mediational means available (the emergent genre of story-writing and its associated artifacts) suggested the form of the response, and this was 'emergent' in that there was little history of such genres evident in Tndv.

Noma's urgency and determination to write/right her wrong was recognised and supported by local members and beyond. 'The moment was seized!' This enabled the articulation of long-suppressed discourses, and the re-articulation of the broader participatory development discourse which had earlier played a role in constructing identities within Khayaalethu.

In strip 3 Noma's appeal was seen as legitimate, she had been wronged and this was to be put right. The reading out of the story had some continuity with verbal presentations in HASSOC meetings in general where the case for issues was often presented, discussed and resolved. At the same time no doubt, officials in HASSOC realized that this story was dangerous for the reputation of the organisation and they acted to contain this possibility.

## **Conclusion**

While addressing the challenges to the New Literacy Studies I have presented a set of data in an attempt at constructing a language of description for meaning making as it shifts contexts. In line with the multi-sited ethnographic approach adopted and the type of data thus collected, I have shown how I constructed a narrative of Nomthamsanqa's meaning making process, from its beginning to its close. Elements of the language of description for describing and analysing this process have been suggested: these are the notion of trajectory, which is composed of strips which are related to events, some of which can be seen as nodes. (The concept of nodes will be explored further in each of the following chapters.) Trajectories cross activity systems and it is in these crossings that

issues of access and inequality, and thus of power and control can be thrown into relief.

The value of activity theory is that it focuses on the ways in which action is mediated for particular actors and participants, through mediational means. Discursive rules and the division of labour also mediate activity, but they are signaled in my thesis, rather than addressed in great detail. Further work could explore and elaborate the value of these parts of the activity system.

At the same time the means are not isomorphic with the activities, there is a degree of choice and constraint, this is the concept of affordance. But neither the means nor their affordances exist outside of the actions; they express the action at the same time as the action instantiates the means. It is the study of recontextualisation that throws this into relief, and the particular example of Noma's trajectory provides a clear illustration of this. Harre's quote (at the beginning of this chapter) about whether material things are passive or active being story-relative, has been addressed in different senses in this chapter.

## Chapter Five. Trajectory Two: Purchasing building materials

*Node n. 1. A knot or complication, as in a drama. 2. A knot, knob, protuberance or swelling. 3. A point at which subsidiary parts center. 4. Anat, and Zool. A swelling, some part likened to a knot. 5. Astron. Either of the two points where the orbit of a planet or comet intersects the ecliptic, or where the orbit of a satellite intersects the plane of the orbit of its primary. The node passed as the body goes north is called the ascending node, that passed in going south, the descending node. 6. Bot. The joint of a stem, also the point of insertion of a leaf or leaves. 7. Geom. A double point, which in regard to intersections counts as more than one point, the coincidence of two non-consecutive points of a curve regarded as a system of points. 8. Physics. A point, line, or surface of a vibrating body marked by absolute or relative freedom from vibratory motion.*

Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary of the English Language. (1960)

### Introduction

This chapter takes the approach developed in Chapter Four and applies it to a different sequence of events - the 'purchasing of building materials', constructing these into a simple trajectory which also has an individual actor as its agent. The concepts of nodes and of mediational means are further developed in this chapter. The moves made in developing the approach involved the descriptions and identification of:

- sequences of events in the meaning making process
- identification of some of these events as nodes
- shifts in the meaning making process across space and participation framework
- grouping of events into strips and into trajectories
- strips as activities taking place within a participation framework
- activities in participation frameworks as mediated action within activity systems
- reading and writing as semiotic resources seen as part of mediational means.

In this chapter I assess the validity of applying these moves to a trajectory of a different scale. The previous trajectory took place over several months. The trajectory reported on in this chapter was part of a much longer one, but I only analyse a portion of it, 'zooming in' on it in order to show that the method of

analysis proposed can be applied in the same way at any scale. I do, however, include some important data beyond the two days.

This trajectory was undertaken by a woman called MamaSolani, who was in the process of building her house. She was part of a group of thirty, starting towards the end of 2000, a few months after the events of Chapter Four and after Noma's house had been rebuilt. MamaSolani had a plot in a row of houses bordering an adjacent shanty-town area, and I knew that this row of houses had been proposed by the architect as a row of double stories in order to provide some sort of boundary or "wall" to Khayaletu. MamaSolani was not intending to build a double storey, it was not clear how she had been allocated this particular plot for her single story house.

The trajectory occurred in the third phase of my involvement with the project when the three amigos had been ousted and a new management committee was slowly coming into existence. The three amigos however, continued to be consulted by the architects, engineers and various members of the broader range of organisations on certain matters. This caused considerable tension and confusion. Two new bookkeepers (Kesslina and Sylvia) had been elected and were working hard to come to terms with the requirements of managing expenditure sheets (ERS). My involvement in the process had greatly increased in this phase of the project, both Monde and Nolwanda were helping me as fieldworkers, and members welcomed the ideas I had had about taking control of the ERS processes.

As in the previous chapter, data was collected in a process of participant observation, with field notes taken on a daily basis. I was also able to use a tape recorder for many of the interactions making up this trajectory. The tapes were transcribed and translated.

## Getting ready to build

MamaSolani was about 55 years old, a single head of household, originally from a rural area in Transkei with isiXhosa as her first language. She had had around six years of schooling in her youth and told us that she was able to write in Xhosa. She was hesitant about speaking English. She had worked as a domestic worker for the same 'white' family in the suburbs of Cape Town for fourteen years.

MamaSolani had organised for the concrete slab (on which the house would be built) to be cast a few days prior to the Thursday, paying R2000 out of her own pocket for this. She had been told that she could start the slab after members had dealt with a long conflict that dragged on over many meetings about whether or not deposits of R500 had been paid by those who were to build. While the slab was being cast I asked her whether she had one of the architect's plans for her house to give to the builder whose name was Matiti. She said no, she had asked him to build the same house as Nyameko's (a few blocks away), it was a 52 sqm house and she liked that particular arrangement of the rooms. MamaSolani told me that she had some materials already, including a window frame that her employers had given her. She had walked 1.5 km from her shack along the busy highway with the window frame in a wheelbarrow to Khayaalethu, and had stored it in TataKhanyile's house. I later came to understand that MamaSolani had decided to only build a 40 sqm house.

There are obviously many antecedent activities to those I have been able to observe as the start of this trajectory. But the portion of the trajectory that I trace in this chapter took place only over a period of a day and a half. The units of analysis therefore are studied in finer detail than those studied in the previous chapter. I will however, indicate how this trajectory intertwined with other trajectories and wider activity systems.

## **Purchasing materials: Thursday's events**

### **Strip 1**

Early on the Thursday morning (11/01/01), MamaSolani visited the new bookkeeper, (Kesslina) at her house. MamaSolani, myself, Kesslina, Nolwanda and two other neighbours were present at the time, and Monde appeared while we were talking. Kesslina told MamaSolani to go to Build-O-Rama that day to order her materials, having first ascertained that MamaSolani had thrown her concrete floor slab. MamaSolani was then given a bank cheque signed by the two bookkeepers for R2000. MamaSolani was worried about getting to the shop and not being able to manage the transactions there, which would be conducted in English or Afrikaans. But everyone in the room told her not to worry and that she simply needed to speak to Funeka ("she will understand everything") when she got to Build-O-Rama. MamaSolani knew roughly what items she needed but the group worked through it with her and told her that she needed to check some things with the builder, Matiti, before she left for the shops. They ran through what would happen at the shop and advised her to get the number of her neighbour's house so that the materials could be delivered there, telling her: "The number is usually written on the electricity board, and it's in Mahobe Street. Make sure you get that number."



*Figure 5.1: MamaSolani seated in Kesslina's room with documents*

This event takes place within a system of 'bookkeeping activities' at Khayaletu, which had emerged after the ousting of the three amigos and the attempts to relocate decision-making back in the General. The activities were characterised by informality and transparent procedures in discussing and dealing with difficult matters, and had found a loose home in the bookkeepers' houses. There were few specialised spaces or times, although activities were linked with and regulated by the meetings of the General. In Kesslina's house the various books and papers she made use of were kept in a pile on her shelf, and brought out on occasions when they became part of the activities taking place in the main room, often amongst neighbourhood gossip and tea-drinking.

It seemed that MamaSolani (although a little daunted by the assertiveness of the younger bookkeepers and their ability to manage finances) felt confident about dropping in at Kesslina's house, having a cup of tea and asking for assistance. MamaSolani was one of many who regularly found their way there, winding their own meaning making trajectories through this informal activity system.



## Strip 2

MamaSolani set out to find Matiti and Monde and I walked over to the open flat area on site with her, and together we waited for him, chatting to a few other women who were working on an adjacent house. Eventually Matiti came racing in, in a truck, and she managed to call him over to ask him what other items she needed. He found a small scrap of paper in amongst MamaSolani's papers and a carpenter's pencil (which he had in his pocket) and wrote down a list on the piece of paper in discussion with MamaSolani:

The following illustration is drawn from a photograph showing this moment. Monde has taken the cheque from MamaSolani and is pointing to it, confirming that the items that Matiti is listing can be bought with that amount of money.



Figure 5.2: Entextualisation - Matiti draws up the list in consultation with MamaSolani (MamaSolani has given the cheque to Monde to look at)

Here is the list that Matiti drew up:

lenters \* 9  
cement 17 bags  
brickforce\* 3  
Door 2 stable\*  
3 inside door frames

---

2 outside door frames

ask for N (Funeka)

HASSOC

*\*Lenters are the word used in Khayaletu for “lintels”, crucial in the building process for strengthening the piece of wall which spans above doors and windows.*

*\*brickforce is a kind of roll made of wire which is inserted into the cement layer in between two courses of concrete blocks in order to help the layers bind better.*

*\*stable doors are doors which are divided into two vertical halves so that the top part can be left open while the bottom half can still be closed (useful if there are small children around etc).*

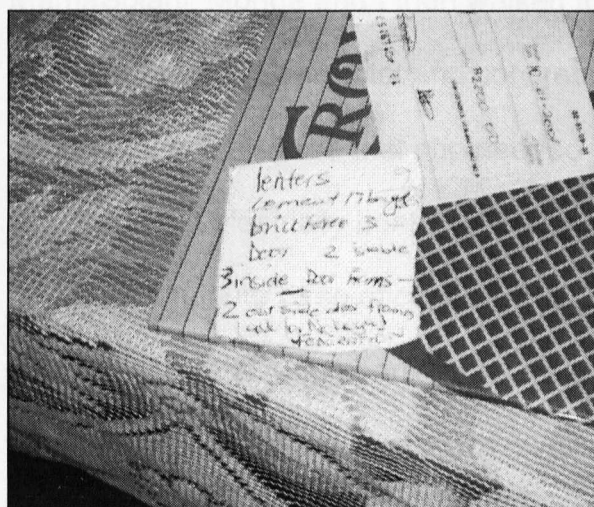


Figure 5.3: List drawn up by Matiti in consultation with MamaSolani

MamaSolani confirmed with Matiti that Funeka was the right person. Matiti then wrote her name down at the bottom of the list and told MamaSolani that she needed to make it clear that she was from HASSOC – which he also wrote down. (Not legible in above diagram).

There were no specialised spaces or times for interacting with the builders, no office or shed where arrangements or payments were made, no point at which

materials were stored. As described, we met on the sandy patch and had happened to catch Matiti as he came in to do other work. Builders were sometimes called to meetings of the General or other special meetings but contact usually occurred on the site while they were working on someone's house, or in Matiti's truck as he was driving through. Now and then someone's house would be borrowed for discussions around the construction processes.

Again, this interaction was characterised by informality, and not so much by transparent procedures but rather by trust. The bookkeepers in strip 1 had attempted to elevate transparency as a reaction to the previous loss of trust in the old bookkeeping system under the three amigos.

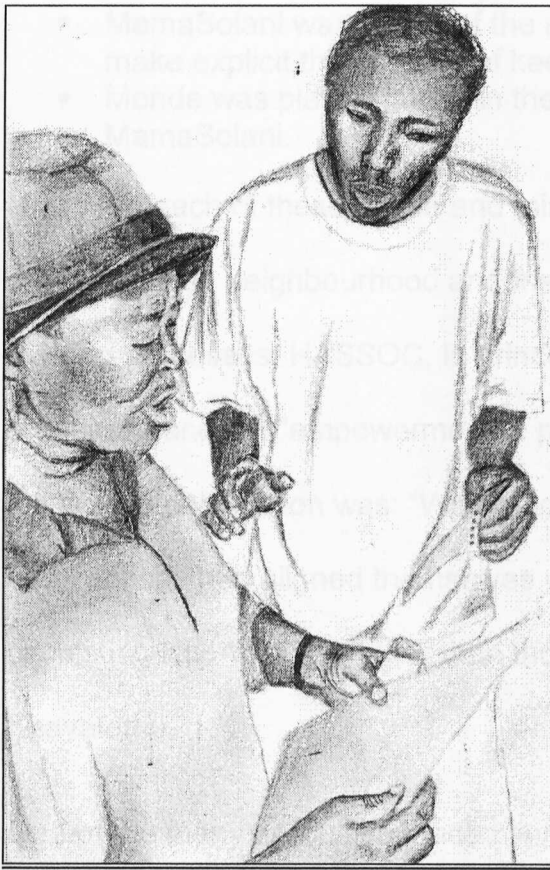
### Strip 3

MamaSolani, Monde and I then walked to MamaD's house in Mahobe Street, opposite MamaSolani's plot and concrete slab. MamaSolani explained to the young boy in the house that she needed to know the number and that it should be written on the electricity board. At that moment MamaD came out of a bedroom and after a minute or so of conversation, pointed to the electricity board to show that there were two numbers on the board but that the second one was the correct one. MamaSolani wrote that down on her list.

This strip took place within a neighbourhood and friendship network, providing resources and support for its members.

### Strip 4

*We then walked back to Kesslina's house, and there we chatted about the expenditure record sheets and how to keep track of amounts.*



*Figure 5.4: MamaSolani works through the process of keeping the ERS with Monde*

In Strip 4 the action moves back to Kesslina's house and the activities around bookkeeping. Like the story-writing group of the previous chapter, this activity system was the point at which my efforts to intervene took shape. I had always intended to embed the interventions I made within what I had called the "existing organisational culture and logic". The fact that in phase three, the ERS initiative became part of this bookkeeping activity system and therefore almost invisible, indicates some degree of success on my part (in the terms that I had defined for the project) in that it truly was embedded within the organisational logic and culture<sup>42</sup>. This was however, an emerging and dynamic logic and culture rather than (as I had conceived it in the original proposal) an existing logic and culture.

The effect that my interventions had had in these strips was evident in that:

- Kesslina (the newly elected bookkeeper) was playing a more conscious role in supporting MamaSolani, and in making the procedures transparent

<sup>42</sup> I would like to stress that any such claims for success were both very momentary and very short-lived.

- MamaSolani was aware of the need to keep track of her expenditure and to make explicit the process of keeping track
- Monde was playing a role in these interactions explicitly supporting MamaSolani.

However, each of these fragile and minimal processes was embedded in existing organisational, neighbourhood and friendship networks, and to some extent, existing processes. HASSOC, in principle, was committed to transparent processes and the “empowerment of people”. In fact, one of the main slogans driving the association was: “We do not only build houses, we build people”. My interventions had aligned themselves with the broader discourses and practices circulating in HASSOC, rather than those that had taken shape on the ground in Khayaletu.

One of the many difficulties I faced in my interventions was the question of profile, and this related to how explicit or how implicit each of the interventions was. Given that the kinds of mediation processes that made up this strip were already occurring to some extent within Khayaletu, the participation framework for the interactions was (also to some extent) already in place. The fact that there was little specialisation of time or place for my interventions was intended, but it also presented difficulties<sup>43</sup>. This is in contrast with the intervention described in the previous chapter in which a special meeting was called for the story-writing process.

### Strip 5

At that point I offered to take MamaSolani to the shop in my car (she was preparing to go by mini-bus taxi) so that I could follow up the process, and Monde offered to come along as well. We drove to the shop, roughly six kilometres away from Khayaletu, in a “coloured” township called Dairy Flat, where the main

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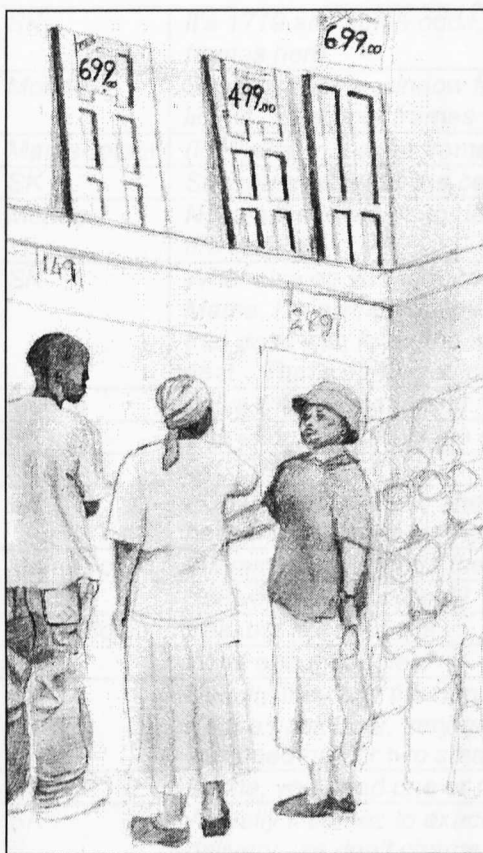
<sup>43</sup> Difficulties arose from the fact that the intervention had little profile, and was therefore very hard to manage and account for.

language spoken was Afrikaans. On entering the shop MamaSolani asked immediately for Funeka, who came forward willingly, clarifying in Xhosa that MamaSolani was from HASSOC and had her cheque ready to pay for the supplies. Funeka checked the scrap of paper on which the builder had written. She then slowly compiled her own hand-written list in a little notebook as together she, MamaSolani and Monde worked through each item: nine lintels, seventeen bags of cement, brickforce and so on.



*Figure 5.5: Mediation at Build-O-Rama. Funeka is taking down the details from MamaSolani's list. Monde is tape-recording the event.*





*Figure 5.6: Discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of stable doors, and relative prices*

There was a long discussion about doors and whether MamaSolani wanted stable doors. Eventually she decided and they were ordered. All of these proceedings took place in Xhosa. At that point she was taken by Funeka to the payment counter, where the proceedings switched to English (partly translated by Monde in lengthy discussions with MamaSolani) while one of the clerks started to tally up her purchases.

First he asked her what branch of the Association she was from, and she indicated that she had been told that she would get the usual discount. He said yes that was correct and then asked her how much money she had, and she showed him the actual cheque from the bookkeepers. He glanced at it briefly to confirm the amount. As he went along he indicated how much she had spent by typing it into the computerised register and then he calculated on a separate calculator on the counter (next to his computer) how much she had left from the total amount of the cheque. So he was adding the amounts of the items she was buying one by one on the invoice in the computer, and also subtracting them one by one from the total amount of the cheque on the calculator. There was again a discussion about the doors, and MamaSolani stated which ones she had ordered. He explained that the "regency flush" was all right as an external door but that it would need to be varnished.

The following is a transcript from the interaction:

SK	<i>It's 1719 and some odds, has she got window frames? I don't see any window frames here.</i>
Monde	<i>She's got some window frames, she's going through the list, there are the lintels... the door frames</i>
MamaSolani	<i>(isiXhosa) ...it's the frames..</i>
SK	<i>She must increase the cement, I see she's got 17...</i>
Monde	<i>No, what she wants to do (listens)....she wants... she wants the toilet seat and the cistern</i>
SK	<i>What else do you require then? What else? Do you want the pan also?....OK, Mama, I'm giving you the pan that you sit on....and I'm giving you the bucket that goes with it, for the water to be retained in there, I'm giving you the toilet seat...That's 1942, you can increase still, you've got a R50 left.</i>
Monde	<i>(talks with MamaSolani)</i>
SK	<i>She should increase the cement by...you always need cement.</i>
Monde	<i>OK, OK hang on -</i>
SK	<i>- Oh, I must give you one or two fittings for the cistern. Oh you need locks, have the got locks for the doors already?</i>
MamaSolani	<i>Mmmm.....nn...there's the front (breaks into Xhosa)...</i>
Monde	<i>You've got for the front?</i>
MamaSolani	<i>Yes, but not the back.</i>
CK	<i>What about handles?</i>
SK	<i>Usually they buy the handles with the lock. The locks are R39.95 with handles, it's the back door, very good quality, it's a Union lock Mama....OK, it's 1982..., you need one or two small fittings for the cistern itself.</i>
Monde	<i>Mama, you need one or two fittings for the cistern.</i>
SK	<i>Actually it comes to exactly R2000 exactly, 2000 and 65 cents, that is with delivery, we don't charge delivery for HASSOC.</i>
MamaSolani	<i>Mmmm..</i>
SK	<i>And it's OK, we've given you the special prices (discount).</i>
Monde	<i>So, Mama, you can add the 65 cents.</i>
SK	<i>Has she got the 65cents?</i>
MamaSolani	<i>(Takes small purse out of her shirt and counts out the 65 cents).</i>
MamaSolani	<i>Come I want you to show me (to Funeka)...</i>
Monde	<i>(to me and shopkeeper) She wants to see the toilet, what kind of a toilet is it...</i>
SK	<i>It's a standard white toilet pan, we'll show you now...</i>



Figure 5.7: MamaSolani at the cashier's desk, with her lock, the computer and the calculator can be seen in the background

The invoice was printed out, and MamaSolani was told to take it to the cashier.

The cashier asked her for her name, took the cheque and then wrote her English



first name on the back of the cheque (I had never heard her use this name). She printed out a receipt and gave it to MamaSolani, taking down the details for delivery: number 243 Mahobe Street, Khayaletu. The receipt was then taken over to the delivery counter.

This strip occurs within a much bigger institution. Build-O-Rama was one shop in a national chain of building suppliers. It was not the closest one to Khayaletu physically, but had developed a reputation for providing a service to many groups affiliated to HASSOC, and was known to give good discounts and free deliveries. The chain had clearly understood that it needed to provide specific customer services. The enormous space was specialised and custom built, with features of both a warehouse and a shop. Roles of participants in this system were also specialised with particular spaces or zones allocated for their work, like the clerk, the cashier, despatch etc. and these people engaged in activities which were complex, established and particularly mediated by text artifacts.

#### Strip 6

*After dropping Monde and MamaSolani back in Khayaletu, I had to leave but Monde and MamaSolani said that they were going back to Monde's house to stick in the receipts and fill in the ERS. I did see later evidence that this occurred when I had a look at MamaSolani's book, and noticed the ERS and receipts had been glued down as we had suggested.*

This strip, and the following one, occur within the 'bookkeeping activity system', which overlaps with the neighbourhood network.

#### Strip 7

*The following Tuesday Monde reported to me: "....all the materials for MamaSolani were delivered to her friend's house on Friday, when the guys delivered I was here. I met them at the entrance and they asked me for the house so I went to see MamaD. MamaSolani and Kota had a joint order. I checked everything and signed for it. I had the receipt anyway, I'd left it at that house. MamaSolani has been there looking for me, I thought I'd go and see her tonight". (FN 16/01/01)*

I follow this trajectory for a strip or two further in time. The data collected here, however, becomes somewhat patchy, making it harder to identify what would count as a strip.

### Strips 8, 9 and 10

*On Wednesday (17/01/01) I had a discussion with MamaSolani. She had managed to buy some blocks from another Khayaletu member so that the builders could start: "On Monday I started building. It'll be 40sqm. Build-O-Rama delivered everything, but I was delayed by the blocks... Now they must work until Thursday, by Friday the blocks will be finished. Today is the first day again and blocks were delivered this morning but only 100... I am still going to divide inside but still the outside is not finished. Pam made the mistake to pay Matiti (for blocks), but he is supposed to finish to the inside. She already paid him R1400 – the full amount of the house, I already gave R1000, it's R1400 for 40sqm. I gave the money to Pam because I'm working weekends so I trust Pam. I gave Pam R1400 on the weekend. I also gave Matiti R200 for sand. He didn't want to wait so he took R200 for the sand. I bought 1800 bricks from Matiti, he's supposed to refund me R20. I don't know exactly how much the bricks were but I paid him last Monday, I got the cheque from Kesslina then."*

*(MamaSolani explained an earlier strip:)*

*CK: When are you going to finish?*

*The problem is Matiti is delaying with the blocks. I must wait here to add the blocks, but there won't be enough. The plan was to come and stay in the house by mid-February but there is the problem of the bricks. I've been talking to him all week but he says he can only bring this morning. I thought maybe I'd be in by February. It's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday till today! Matiti says the truck must come from the factory....*

*CK: Is the money going to be enough? If you run out what will you do?*

*So that's why I'm sitting here, when Matiti comes with the truck then he will give the bricks to another person, if he doesn't see the person of the house. I'll sit here till 5pm. Since Monday he says the truck is coming. That's why I'm still waiting. Forty square metres now takes four weeks.*

I later heard that MamaSolani was delayed again in building because Matiti had disappeared with the money for the concrete blocks. This caused chaos in the project as around eight people had paid approximately R22 000 from their subsidies to Matiti for blocks. When I probed as to why people had given him the money prior to receipt of the bricks people said that Matiti was "known to us," was "one of us", that he could be trusted, and that he had done a lot for the community<sup>44</sup>. Monde and Nolwande explained to me:

*Nolwando: MamaSolani was shouting at Matiti. Faye, Nolutshunga and the builders were also cross – they went to the garage. He doesn't even promise you about tomorrow but today! The women say they want another person, they are too slow because of Matiti!... The reason they gave it (money) was because of trust, things were moving fast at that time.... If he goes first to the General, people will throw him with stones.*

*Monde: People must understand the concept of this thing, how much money they have and keep a diary of their lives.*

*Nolwando: Maybe Kesslina and Christine are shy that they don't understand the ERS, I can talk to people about what's happening but it's very sensitive, but people are very open to Christine. The women are so quiet at meetings...people have the books but they don't know what's happening. Kesslina wrote cheques for Kota and Faye for blocks, but they gave the money to Matiti, that was*

<sup>44</sup> This notion of trust is captured in an interesting conversation between Nonthutu and the builders reported in Chapter 7.

R3325 each. The left the cheque open so that Matiti could fill in the amount – they trusted him. (FN06/02/01)

After this discussion we walked over to Kesslina's house where she and two other women (MamaTafeni and Zoliswa) were drinking tea and eating biscuits:

Monde says he needs tea. Kesslina is going through her accounts book. The delivery truck comes with MamaSolani's frames...MamaTafeni offers to take care of them for her. Nolwando is sitting on the floor, going through her book and writing down those who are finished with their money. There is a heated discussion with Monde for mediating with Matiti. I asked how much people had paid to him for the blocks, and Nolwando went through the stubs in her cheque book. As she went through

	5 4 3		
G <del>XXXXXX</del>	R3325.00	4/01	
S <del>XXXXXX</del>	R2800.00	9/01	had some blocks (inside)
→ M <del>XXXXXX</del>	R2775.00	12/01	
M <del>XXXXXX</del>	R2775.00	12/01	
N <del>XXXXXX</del>	R 975.00		(cash)
Q <del>XXXXXX</del>	R3575.00	15/01	
→ A <del>XXXXXX</del>	550.00		
G <del>XXXXXX</del>	3325.00		Maybe paying bills E this \$5, learnt from the 3 Amigos – nothing happened to them!
T <del>XXXXXX</del>	3325.00		
	<u>R23 425.00</u>		
		401	

them I wrote the details down in my notebook:

Figure 5.8: Cathy's calculation showing amounts paid to Matiti

CK (adding up the figures with others looking over my shoulder): So it's 23 thousand four hundred and twenty-five.

All: Yho!

Zoliswa: Maybe Matiti is paying his bills with this money – he learnt from the three amigos – nothing happened to them!

.....

At that moment Monde sees Matiti driving down the street. Everyone shouts out. Monde jumps up and runs to catch him. Matiti stops the truck, and is pulled in by Monde and sits down. Nolwanda and Kesslina start to question him insistently.

Kesslina: We want to know what the problem is. We want to be able to cancel the order and go to another place.

Matiti: Please just give me two days to sort out the problem. I've ordered the truck and I can work tomorrow. These small orders I need to deliver with the bakkie (small truck), the bigger ones need the truck. On Thursday I will take the delivery.

Zoliswa: We've got the right to know which company you've ordered from as it is our money that you've used.

Nolwanda: Give him till Thursday.

Kesslina: No, he must leave the name of the company.

Nolwanda: It will be difficult to refund the money so let's give him till Thursday.

*Kesslina: But then he must leave the details with us.*

*Zoliswa: He must leave the details, and then people must come to us....*

*MamaTafeni: I want to raise the question that if the General decides to say - not to buy from Matiti anymore. They will know to push people to buy from Eureka.*

*Nolwanda: On Thursday if you are not bringing the blocks then you must give us the details.*

*Matiti: There are lots of people, Faye, Nolutshunga and so on. I know about them. I am supposed to deliver to Kota and MamaSolani. I must first resolve them, for the army guy I have got the cheque from Pam.*

*MamaTafeni:...(cross) –*

*Monde: You must answer to the meeting tomorrow. There is a worry that you'll lose the business of the people. People came to you because they were trusting you. People will say that you must refund their money.*

*Matiti: (looks at me [CK], half addressing me) MamaTafeni is very cross, I can see that she is not my friend anymore (tries to laugh).*

*Monde: What are you doing about the truck?*

*Matiti: I've got a big problem with them, but this week surely, surely, I'll make sure the bricks will be delivering.*

*MamaTafeni (shouting): UMosha (you are making people cross). From the first cheque you were supposed to buy cement to make the blocks here – why...what is the reason this does not go now?*

*Matiti: I'm not answering that...(FN 6/02/01)*

A later development occurred when I was told that sometime after the cheques had been handed over to Matiti and he had gone missing, the members (including MamaSolani) decided that they would **physically occupy** the space in the old sheds where he stored blocks that he had been transporting from site to site. The aim of this action was to physically force Matiti to route the blocks to Khayaletu rather than to other sites on which he was working.

So MamaSolani sat waiting, and waiting, with her building supplies stacked in MamaD's house and her receipts carefully pasted into her book.

The following figure shows the trajectory broken down into its constituent strips:

Strip	Timescale	Place	Participants
1 Getting the cheque	Thursday 9.00	Kesslina's house	MamaSolani, Kesslina and Zoliswa
2 Confirming materials	Thursday 10.30	On sandy area	MamaSolani, Monde, Matiti, Cathy
3 Getting the number of the neighbour's house	Thursday 11.00	In MamaD's house	MamaSolani, boy, young woman, Cathy

4 Talking about need to keep track of expenditure	Thursday 11.30	In Kesslina's house	MamaSolani, Kesslina, Cathy, Monde
5 Going to Build-O-Rama	Thursday 12.30 – 2.30	Shopping centre	MamaSolani, Funeka, Monde, Cathy, Clerk, Cashier and others
6 Returning to Khayaletu and sticking in receipts	Thursday 3.00	Kesslina's house	MamaSolani, Monde, Kesslina and others
7 Taking receipt of delivery of materials	Friday 3.00	MamaD's house	MamaD, Monde, Driver
8,9,10 Ordering of blocks from Matiti, attempts to get back the payments, physical occupation of the shed.	Three weeks	Various	Various

*Figure 5.9: Sequential analysis of strips in “Ordering materials”*

I will briefly touch on a further set of activities, occurring within different activity systems. A few weeks later I spoke to the architect’s assistant and asked her how things were going at Khayaletu. She said that Hans, the architect, was away but that when he saw what was happening there he was “going to cry”. He had designed the end row of houses as a “wall” to the settlement, and if the members kept deviating from the plan in this way Khayaletu was “going to turn into a slum”, when it could have been a model project in urban design principles.

**Moment by moment: nodes and strips**

The concept of the node is important in relation to strips. In MamaSolani’s trajectory each event corresponds with a strip, rather than in Noma’s trajectory where events were sometimes grouped into strips. In MamaSolani’s trajectory each strip contains at least one node whereby the trajectory flows more or less according to the expectations of all participants, even as it crosses contexts. I will now turn to an analysis of these nodes.

In strip 1, I argue that a critical node that occurred almost immediately when MamaSolani asked Kesslina for her bank cheque to take to Build-O-Rama to buy her materials.

Kesslina already knew that everyone who was building a 40 square metre house needed to spend their subsidy money in a similar way, depending on what materials they had already acquired personally (like MamaSolani had acquired the window frame which she had brought in the wheelbarrow)<sup>45</sup>. This meant that the money was paid out in four or five rough amounts. Kesslina needed to check that the person-to-build had a quotation for their house. These quotations had been drawn up by the architects and there were a number of standard ones depending on size and layout. Kesslina also needed to make sure that the person asking for the cheque had actually built their slab and had managed to make a plan about getting the concrete blocks. At that point she wrote out the cheque to Build-O-Rama for a fairly standard amount – R2000. She then signed it on behalf of Khayaletu and handed it over to MamaSolani.

This node was created by the participants drawing on the mediational means available. However, the node in the activity system brought together a number of different institutions – the bank, the FSO, Khayaletu and the architects. This bringing together was represented in the writing of the cheque, and the cheque represented a “join” (Smith, 1999), materialised as a “boundary object” (Bowker and Star, 1999). Each written element on the cheque indexed the activities of each of these institutions, standardising the relation between them. For example, the written amount invoked earlier discussions between and around Khayaletu members, the architect and the quotation process. Kesslina’s signature

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<sup>45</sup> There were therefore two systems of accounting. The one was the official system whereby the money paid out by the FSO was recorded. The other was the “real” cost of the house which included all the money added by the individual members through payments and the acquisition of materials. So, for example, MamaSolani’s window frame may have added to the cost if she had given her employer R50 for it. But it was very hard to keep track of this. I was trying to develop a process whereby this type of expenditure was recorded as a kind of “people’s history”, but also so that housing policy could be informed by actual data illustrating the relation between the informal and the formal contributions to the building process. If the People’s Housing Process (PHP) was to be successful it needed to be realistic and even though MamaSolani was building the smallest possible house achievable within the subsidy amount (40sqm), there were a number of additional costs involved.

standardised and confirmed the relation between the bank, Khayaletu and the shop.

In strip 2, the node was created when MamaSolani asked Matiti to confirm her memorised list, and Matiti pulled out his pencil, found a piece of paper and wrote down the list.

Matiti had authority from his role as a builder, he did not listen very closely to MamaSolani and was more concerned with telling her what was needed. As can be seen in Figure 5.2 MamaSolani had taken the cheque out of her plastic bag with its documents and Monde had checked the amount, while Matiti was drawing up the list. Each item was negotiated verbally before or while being written, and agreement was reached at each point. MamaSolani also received confirmation from Matiti that Funeka was the person who would mediate the process, and that there would be a discount because she was a member of HASSOC. Both points were recorded at the bottom of the list as reminders to MamaSolani. The verbal list and instructions became more durable and less negotiable at that point.

The concept of **node** therefore captures the *interactional moment* at which a “join” is created or comes into play, and this join may be materialised as a boundary object. The activity systems connected by this join (or boundary object) then intersect (even if momentarily). These points of intersection are reminiscent of the definitions of “node” ascribed to geometry or physics in the definition quoted at the very beginning of this chapter. The value of the concept is that it enables the identification of the point (space and time are specific) when the boundary object comes into play in the participant framework. It represents adjacent or more distant activity systems (indexing either those from which the meaning has

previously been generated, or those to which it will need to shift) and these then come into play with each other<sup>46</sup>.

The mediational means available to participants are objective and contingent on the division of labour and the broader social forces playing a role in structuring the activity system in the first place. The implication is that different mediational means become available as meaning making flows across the activity systems (i.e. the contexts). The same or similar meanings can be communicated in alternative communicative modes depending on what mediational means are available. Depending on how exactly the node allows for the intersections of different activity systems, the node can offer different affordances for participants' choice of which means will best express the meaning they intend. There are, in addition, subjective factors in the choice of mode, in that the ability to choose modes or mode-switch is dependent on participants' individual histories and identities.

I call it a node rather than a numeracy or literacy event, because it plays a role in the ongoing configuration of meaning making in this trajectory.

The question might then be asked "what is the difference between a node (involving say, written language) and an event (say, a literacy event)?" The answer is that a node occurs within a strip, and a strip is related to a trajectory. A trajectory can cross activity systems. Activity systems intersect. Actors or subjects who are carrying out meaning making activities attempt to project their meanings through action, and this action is composed of "mediational means". However, these attempts are always interactional, and are always negotiated or contested.

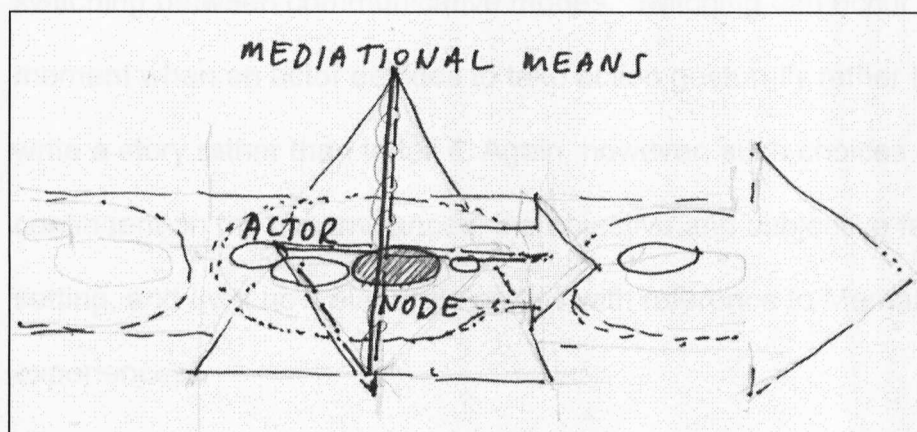
The node is also the point in the strip when the meaning carried from an antecedent activity system is recontextualised. It is in the node that the

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<sup>46</sup> This is reminiscent of Brandt and Clinton's argument cited earlier about literacy as a "transcontextualising agent". In contrast, I hope that this example shows the contingency of literacy on context and agency.



recontextualisation occurs, and the mediational means drawn on by the actor in relation to the meaning making process come to the fore. The interactions making up a strip can continue long after the node, or can take place prior to the occurrence of the node, but the mediational means being drawn on are no longer (or not yet) critical to the pathway of the strip.



*Figure 5.10: The node – the point at which the mediational means become pivotal*

The conceptual ‘nesting’ of the node within the strip, of the strip within the trajectory and of the trajectory within or crossing activity systems enables finely nuanced distinctions to be drawn around what is relevant data in the study of an interaction, and in the relation between interactions. The concept of “event”, on the other hand, begs the broader question of the framework or system within which it belongs. This seems, in my view, to explain the proliferation of work around the concept of communities of practice. As indicated previously, it is my view that the concept of communities of practice does not have the analytical specificity to take forward theoretical work in literacy studies. Furthermore, as Bloome et al (2005) have explored and as presented in Chapter Four, the concept of events as the empirical space in which practices come into play with one another suggests that people might be captured by those literacy practices, while Bloome et al’s theorisation sees “events as spaces in which people act on their circumstances, on and with the literacy practices that are given and available” (ibid:6). In the

concept of “node” therefore, I attempt to capture a sense of agency, but to illustrate that agency is always constrained by means, in the case of this thesis the means are mediational, but also material (in that they often involve text-artifacts). Discursive mediation also occurs through the rules at play in the activity system. Finally, I attempt to capture a sense that nodes are the moments which enable switching between communicative modes. Switching can occur in the fleeting moment when an actor decides to take action gesturally rather than verbally, or to write a story rather than to tell it. Again, however, such choices or switches are contingent on the circumstances, the objective and subjective factors in the setting, and I will now elaborate on this with reference to MamaSolani’s experiences.

### **Entextualisation, recontextualisation and artifacts**

As discussed in Chapter Two, Bauman and Briggs (1990:77) suggest that recontextualising a text is an act of control, and in regard to “the differential exercise of such control the issue of social power arises”. Social power can be described as involving dimensions of access, legitimacy, competence and values, and these are “deeply implicated in the construction and assumption of authority” (ibid:77). Looking back on Chapter Four, we can see that each of these dimensions came into play and were crucial in Noma’s ability to change her circumstances. In MamaSolani’s case, there are differences. As in the previous chapter, I will thread the definition of communication as involving discourse, design, production and distribution (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2003) through the social dimensions put forward by Bauman and Briggs.

- Strip 2 involved the confirming of and writing of the list of building materials by Matiti.

MamaSolani had access to Matiti, she simply had to walk across the site to find him. She could recognise the demands of the task (confirming the list of materials), although she was somewhat dubious or tentative about being able to realise its demands. She had been exposed to these demands through many months of involvement at Khayaletu. Her recognition of the demands of the task was further facilitated or scaffolded by the interactions in strip 1, when the bookkeepers went through the process with her and told her to check the details with Matiti. MamaSolani was a legitimate actor in strip 2, her participation was legitimated by her long membership in Khayaletu and was confirmed by her ownership of her plot, her casting of her concrete slab, her engagement of Matiti as her builder and the presence of the cheque in her hand.

The design and production of the communicative events involved being able to realise the demands of the task. MamaSolani had not written her own list of items down, and had not, for example, brought a pencil with her. She probably imagined memorising the items as she had already done so in strip 1, and in earlier antecedent events. However, she initiated the discussion with Matiti and offered each of the items she had already memorised for negotiation. In this discussion, Matiti initiated the entextualisation of the items, drawing on the mediational means with which he was familiar – the carpenter's pencil was found in a pocket, a piece of paper was found in MamaSolani's plastic bag. The items were therefore recontextualised as words on the list, the "doors" discussed in strip 1 became "doors 2 stable" on the list. Each point that MamaSolani tentatively raised was confirmed and written down by Matiti. MamaSolani grew more confident as she realised the demands of the process. Even though Mama did not write the list herself, she was fully involved in its production, and her identity was in no way diminished by the fact that she did not write it.

The text-artifact was then physically recontextualised as MamaSolani carried it to Build-O-Rama.

- Strip 5 involved the purchase of the building materials at Build-O-Rama.

As we entered the shop MamaSolani asked for Funeka, and as soon as Funeka arrived she confirmed that she was from HASSOC and that she would therefore receive the discount. Access and legitimacy were therefore assumed. This was a node, where Funeka started her own list as she worked through Matiti's list. Monde and Funeka assumed roles of authority in relation to MamaSolani in the shop, as they mediated her purchasing of materials, code-switching between English and Xhosa. However, at each point it was MamaSolani who made the decision about what she wanted, and this can be clearly seen in the transcript of the discussion with the clerk in strip 5.

When it comes to competence, it is interesting to speculate about the relation between design and production in the realisation of meaning. MamaSolani would have been able to 'code-break', since this is usually learnt in the early years of schooling i.e. she may have been able to sound out the words written on her receipt, her list, her cheque. This may or may not have been easier for her given that all of the words in the set of transactions were in English, her second or third language. However, I did not observe her doing any physical reading at all of the various words in the texts that were produced, received, exchanged and negotiated. She therefore designed the communicative actions, jointly with those around her, but much of the production in these actions fell to these others.

She drew on pragmatic and semantic resources admirably. She knew that it would be useful if Matiti wrote down the materials she needed on the scrap of paper; that she had to note the number of her neighbour's house for the delivery; that she needed to give the cheque to the clerk, to keep her receipt and so on.

She also knew that there had been many problems previously with the keeping of records and that it would be important to try to keep control of her own expenditure sheet. There was an aspect of a metapragmatic competence here, in that earlier critiques of the bureaucratic style of the three amigos, conflicting with the participatory development discourse were invoked as MamaSolani engaged with the need to maintain her own ERS.

In each transaction in these strips she drew on the people around her to play the role of literacy mediators, Matiti, the bookkeepers, her neighbour's child who read out the number on the electricity board, Monde, Funeka and the clerk at Build-O-Rama. Her participation in these extended networks was characterised by high degrees of trust and support. However, these textually mediated organisational processes did break down in the later strips, when Matiti disappeared with people's money, when the second instalment of the subsidy could not be released, when allegations of corruption were not addressed.

The items on the scrap of paper were recontextualised in a process of formalisation and translation when they became items in Funeka's own notebook. They then became items on the computer-generated list the clerk drew up, regulated through the financial transactions<sup>47</sup>. The computer-generated list then became materialised as doors, cement, a toilet, which were delivered to and stored in MamaD's house in strip 7. At the same time the receipt which MamaSolani received was glued into her notebook, and the amounts were entered into her expenditure sheet, in an interaction mediated again by the bookkeepers but with MamaSolani's participation.

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<sup>47</sup> The financial transactions worked in two ways, through a process of addition on the computer, accompanied by a process of subtraction from the total amount of the cheque on the calculator. The computer and the calculator can be seen in Figure 5.7.

In the following table, one artifact – a door, is isolated out from the trajectory, and considered across the strips. The initial lexical item is realised verbally and is then recontextualised through other semiotic modes until the material object (the door) arrives at the location near where it is to be given the meaning of “the front door”.

verbal interaction (strip 1)	“doors”
Matiti’s written list (strip 2)	Door 2 stable
spatial visual interaction (strip 5)	Labelled door (photograph of door in shop)
Funeka’s written list (strip 5)	Regency Flush
computerised invoice (strip 5)	25991 Regency Flush
payment transaction (strip 5)	R789.59
delivery (strip 6)	receipt and photograph of door
building (s)	(photograph of house with door)

*Figure 5.11: Stable door progresses on durability scale, moment by moment*

Unfortunately, the building does not proceed, the trajectory stops at that point (as a result of other trajectories stalling) and the items were not materialised further into ‘a house’. This particular trajectory therefore, did not result in the production of more durable meanings (the house) or achieve closure.

By way of contrast, Iedema describes what he calls the formalising of organisational meaning: “formalisation is achieved on the strength of the recontextualisation of meaning from one discourse or practice to another”. He claims that “organisational processes of recontextualisation tend to increasingly technologise meanings with respect to both what they signify and their materialisation” (1999:49). He describes a:

...process of recontextualisation towards increasingly durable and formal realisations. It shows that this occurs first in talk itself, by the shift from localised to abstract or time-space distanciated constructions of the

'real'....Simultaneously, these formalised constructions of the 'real' are inscribed into more durable and resistant materialities, in that sound is recontextualised as imprinted paper, which is itself again recontextualised as steel and brick.

The problem with Iedema's analysis is that, by assuming a uni-directional movement towards durability, he himself has technologised the process, assuming a seamless progression involving transformation into more durable forms of meaning. In addition, he talks about the recontextualisation of meaning from one discourse to another but what he means by discourse in this case is not clear. There has to be an intervening layer of analysis that situates recontextualisation in context and/or practice, if technologisation is to be avoided. The data reported on in this thesis shows that assumptions about uni-directionality cannot be applied universally, if they can be made at all. I will return to this issue in later chapters and in the conclusion.

### **Reification or naturalisation?**

I argue that the entextualisation process and the text-artifacts were naturalised in this trajectory, rather than reified as they were in Noma's story-writing. I make this claim on the basis that at no point in the trajectory was attention drawn by participants to the entextualisation process or to the text-artifacts as texts in themselves. In contrast therefore with Noma's trajectory there was no meta-pragmatic framing. Kesslina wrote out the cheque rather silently, Matiti drew up the list as a matter of course, Funeka took out her little notebook incidentally and no-one referred to it, the clerk at no point drew attention to his list. The recontextualisation that occurred with each strip happened seamlessly, and proceeded more or less predictably, according to expectations. The fact that MamaSolani managed to purchase a toilet and locks in addition to the items on her list seemed simply to express the smoothness of the process. The only exception was in strip 6, when MamaSolani, Monde and I discussed the need to

stick the receipts into the book and to write up the expenditure in the ERS.

However, again, this was seen as a necessary chore fairly incidentally embedded into the ongoing activity<sup>48</sup>.

As Russell (1997:515) states:

The use of some tool in some way is, social-psychologically, a typified response to some need for action with others. Its routinised, operationalised use is a way of continuing to work with others in more or less but never entirely predictable ways. For experienced insiders in a profession, for example, their ways of writing may be so routine that they come to seem natural. In this sense, genre helps account for social-psychological stability, identity and predictability.

Further, Bowker and Star (1999:299), as mentioned in Chapter Three, describe naturalisation as involving “stripping away the contingencies of an object’s creation and its situated nature”. They claim that in that “narrow sense it is de-situated” and that “members have forgotten the local nature of the object’s meaning or the actions that go into maintaining and recreating its meaning”. In the final chapter of this thesis I will explore these issues in relation to the concept of indexicals.

Furthermore, and in contrast with Nomathamsanqa’s trajectory, in MamaSolani’s trajectory she did not actually do any of the reading and writing necessary for the trajectory to proceed, but relied on the mediators around her. I am fully aware of how complex and power-laden literacy mediation processes can be and I certainly do not want to under-estimate the negative effects that can ensue from these processes (many of which I noticed in Khayaletu myself), but I do want to point out that the mediation processes in this trajectory worked in an entirely benign way. This need not have been the case however, and MamaSolani was all too aware of that potential. There may be an implication that when entextualisation

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<sup>48</sup> This is exactly as I had envisaged the process of my intervention at Khayaletu, and as I had wished it to be, in contrast with the process that occurred with Nomathamsanqa (which took me completely by surprise). It is ironic therefore that Nomathamsanqa’s had a greater impact and I will touch on this point further in the conclusion.



and recontextualisation processes are naturalised from the perspective of the actor, mediation can be benign. I will explore this point further in later chapters.

I will briefly review this analysis of MamaSolani's trajectory in the light of the four problems identified in Chapters Three and Four.

### **Understanding flows as sequences of events rather than single instance events.**

I have aimed to illustrate the validity of studying the movement of meanings as the complex unit of analysis. In order to stabilise the flow of meaning making for the purpose of study I have broken the unit of analysis down into strips and grouped these into trajectories. The sequence analysed in trajectory two operates at a more micro temporal scale than that of trajectory one (1.5 days as opposed to five months), but it demonstrates that the method can be applied in variable ways; it has flexibility. The focus of the analysis has again shifted towards that of agency and of actors undertaking meaning making processes.

I have introduced the concept of nodes as offering specificity to the study of events. Events do occur in strips, but an event is not necessarily a node. Nodes are interactional moments within strips where mediational means are specifically chosen or drawn on by actors to further their meaning making processes. This moment of choice is an aspect of what Kress calls the "design" of communication, and it prefigures the "production" of the communication, even if only by a split second. As mediational means, different communicative modes can be drawn on in these nodes, and the way in which this occurs can lead to a reconfiguring of the strip and therefore the trajectory, or alternatively to a seamless and smooth progression of strips and therefore of the trajectory as predicted by participants. Entextualisation processes can take place at nodes or be triggered at nodes, and the resultant text-artifacts can express joins between different activity systems,

materialised as boundary objects. The workings of distant activity systems (like the bank in the signing of the cheque) can be momentarily instantiated in these joins or boundary objects and the node becomes the point at which their different trajectories cross the trajectory under study. This is further illustrated in Chapter Seven.

### **The boundaries of context and the problem with making inferences about literacy practices.**

Some of the problems with conceptualising 'context' are overcome with the heuristic of activity systems. Engeström claims that activity systems are contexts. In this sense context is accomplished in action and conceived of as integrally related to precise actions and processes; rather than given, as a container surrounding action and process. Given this integral relation it is now more possible to limit what counts as context and what data is relevant for an understanding of context.

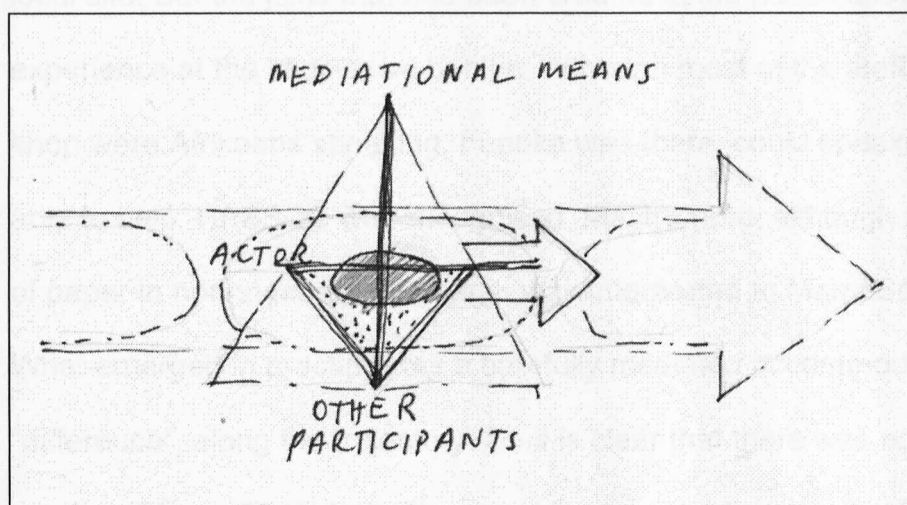
This definition of context therefore has implications for what inferences can be made about literacy practices, and even in fact how literacy practices are defined. Extracting the actual literacy events from each strip shows the difficulties in making inferences about practices. Certainly the traces of literacy are evident in each strip, and the traces of numeracy are evident in some strips. But there is huge variability across the strips, and sometimes literacy is not chosen as a mode of communicating meaning, but bodily action, for example. Street's definition of a literacy practice as a "broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (2003: 2) is difficult to apply when studying the uses and valuing of literacy across this trajectory. Each strip contains evidence of different cultural conceptions, uses and valuing, and these are all both variable and standardised. When a strip is isolated, like the

signing of the cheque in strip 1, the literacy practice is not necessarily different from the literacy practice that could occur anywhere else in the world. Even Matiti's writing of the list (in strip 2) is not very different from that undertaken by anyone building a house anywhere in the world. However, when the strips are pieced together into the trajectory, it is the meaning making that is unique and important (purchasing materials for house building in South Africa in the year 2000). Literacy is intimately embedded in the sequence of events that comprise this meaning making process – in fact the sequence could not have occurred without it. But I argue that naming “the stuff” of this trajectory “literacy events” and “literacy practices” is not useful or apposite at this stage of analysis. In the conclusion to this thesis I argue that these terms are entirely useful and apposite at a later stage of analysis, at a different analytical level.

In the process of writing a list to facilitate the purchase of building materials it is not the literacy that needs to be highlighted, it is the step towards the buying process that needs to be highlighted. It is the social practice of building that creates the meaning at the heart of this strip, and it is in the flow of strips that the meaning is realised. Literacy is therefore *in the service of* this social practice and is not a practice in itself. For this reason I find Bloome et al's approach to defining literacy practices “as semiotic resources ... conceptualised from within the event by participants” useful (2005:7). As I have shown, literacy is one amongst many semiotic resources drawn on to make meaning, others that have been drawn on in this chapter and the previous are the verbal (or spoken language) and the gestural or bodily modes of communication.

## Shifting from a linguistic frame of reference to multi-modality and semiotics as the frame of reference

I believe that a focus simply on language and on written language in particular would again have constrained the analysis of this meaning making process. In order to understand the flow of events it was necessary to identify the nodes at which activity systems were brought into engagement with each other. These nodes came into being through the deployment of varying mediational means including written or spoken language, numerical codes or bodily gestural action (the physical occupation of the block making site). MamaSolani did not always draw on these means directly herself, she drew on the other participants in the activity system to achieve her object. It could be claimed that there was a double mediation going on here, in that MamaSolani drew on mediators who themselves mediated her actions through various semiotic means.



*Figure 5.12: Double mediation: mediation through mediational means and other participants*

Finally, Problem Four involved finding a warrant for making claims about literacy, power and social structure. As indicated previously this problem will be addressed in Chapter Eight. In Chapter Eight I will assess the implications of this analysis for our understandings of literacy and particularly, the concept of literacy practices.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have tested the approach developed for analysing Noma's writing a wrong trajectory, by identifying, describing and analysing a second trajectory. MamaSolani's trajectory made a number of traversals at Khayaletu itself (from strip to strip) and then crossed to the Building Supply shop in a more remote context. I extended the analysis of Noma's trajectory by focusing on the concept of nodes as the interactional moments at which joins between activity systems are constructed, and these may be materialised as boundary objects, which may or may not involve literacy.

Tracing the events along this trajectory enables certain claims to be made about literacy. The events at the shop can be seen as involving 'more distant' literacy practices from MamaSolani's experiences involving literacy at Khayaletu, the local site. But the joins that had been created in the nodes allowed for her experience at the shop to be benign. Although most of the staff members at the shop were Afrikaans speaking, Funeka was there, could speak Xhosa and was able to help. HASSOC was recognised. Matiti's note, although written on a scrap of paper in non-standard language, was interpreted to MamaSolani's advantage. What emerged in practice was a carefully mediated accommodation of "difference", along the trajectory. So it is clear that there was no essentialised version (Street, 2003b) of either local literacy practices or non-local ones.

At the same time, however, we do see that although this benign process worked to MamaSolani's advantage, a broader set of less benign processes was working through different trajectories and these crossed at Khayaletu as MamaSolani was trying to move ahead with her building.

## Chapter Six. Trajectory Three: “Recording Activeness”

*It is remarkable that whenever we say that text is situated in discourse-analytical terms, we seem to refer to forms of strict locality: the unique, one-time, and micro-situatedness of text. From this individual situatedness, larger structures, patterns of rules can then be deduced, but these generalisations do not involve higher-level situatedness: discourse seems to lose context as soon as it is raised above the single-text level.*  
(Blommaert, 2005:67)

### Introduction

In Chapter Five I applied the method developed in Chapter Four to a simple meaning making trajectory, limited in time but expanding across space, and undertaken largely through the agency of one individual. In this chapter and the next, I extract two complex trajectories from the mass of data I accumulated. The trajectory discussed in this chapter is called “recording activeness”. In this chapter the analytical lens turns to methodological issues in working with the ethnographic data collected, and the relation between this data and the development of a language of description. The language of description consolidates and elaborates the concepts derived from a study of the data in Chapters Four and Five, and is again applied to the new data that makes up the recording activeness trajectory.

The term “activeness” was central to the workings of Khayaletu as an organisation and was understood and accepted by all members of Khayaletu, from early on. “Activeness” meant that members of the savings clubs took part in the savings clubs’ activities, attending meetings, taking part in decision making at meetings, saving money. Once the process of building Khayaletu began, they needed to be present and working on site for a proportion of days per week (if they could not make the days themselves they had to send someone else). Working on site involved different things in different phases. In an early phase it meant literally

sleeping on the site in order to protect building materials from being stolen. A little later it meant participating in the making of concrete blocks (this process was later abandoned as the quality of the blocks was not good enough and the price was no less than blocks ordered from building supply shops). At times it meant working on the houses of particular individuals, when these were built collectively.

Recording activeness was central to the whole house building project because those who were recorded as active could then qualify for a site and the right to build a house. They could then make use of the government subsidy, the revolving bridging funds offered by the FSO and the overall support and services offered through Khayaletu structures and processes. Members who had “shown activeness” (this is the term that was used by people on site and it was an English term not a Xhosa term) qualified for the first twenty houses which were being built, the next set of site allocations was due to be made during this phase, and arising from these allocations the next forty houses were to be built. The recording activeness process therefore translated into a site allocation process. Mechanisms whereby this translation process occurred are central to this chapter.

The numerous, varied processes of which house building was composed may be seen as happening simultaneously (synchronous) or sequentially (asynchronous), but most of the work reported in this thesis deals with sequential trajectories. This was a conscious choice on my part. I had identified that the movement of meaning across contexts (involving space and time) was the focus of study. But a related reason for this choice was that I was interested in the identifiable, tangible and material process of building houses (or maybe not building them) involving sequential operations towards a material outcome; rather than, for example, the

construction of identity amongst Khayaalethu members, the study of which may have required more of a focus on synchronous processes<sup>49</sup>.

The trajectory as an element in the language of description, therefore, offers a way of disentangling multiple, complex processes, for analysis. In question is the issue of how closely this concept (on the etic plane) matches events and understandings on the emic plane. Hymes (in Headland, 1990: 133) argues that the test of etic constructs is not their origin, but their appropriateness. I asked myself: Am I nominalising the concept of “recording activeness” or are the members of Khayaalethu, the SO, HASSOC and so on, busy at nominalising it? Am I reifying intentionality and directionality? In Chapter Four Nomathamsanqa would certainly not have said that she was “undertaking a meaning making trajectory called writing a wrong”!

These questions lie at the heart of social scientific research, in particular, ethnographic research. They are addressed more fully in the final chapter. I believe Nomathamsanqa knew she was busy exploring the ways she could take action to address the problem of her house and her feeling of being wronged. Likewise, in this chapter Khayaalethu members felt that they needed to go through a process of recording activeness in order to take forward their aim of building houses. This research shows (albeit in a rudimentary and imperfect way) that it is possible to identify and gain understanding of the transformation processes leading to nominalisation in the first place. This is why I talk about “recording activeness” as “in the process of becoming”, of emergence. During this process of becoming, “activeness” comes to be an indexical, what Harre calls a “social

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<sup>49</sup> The study of simultaneous processes, as opposed to sequential ones, would, I suggest, draw on theories and debates about intertextuality. I believe the study of the construction of identity in and through communicative practices is a hugely interesting focus and could have been a rich area of study for me. However, I felt that I needed to define what I was ‘seeing’ before I could undertake that kind of study.



substance” the sense of which is “incomplete unless related to a particular flow of social acts, a particular social world” (2002:24).

It is important to differentiate between the two levels or planes of analysis. The first is the emic; the perspectives and material conditions of the Khayaletu members and others on site and connected with it. The second is the etic; the research process, guided by theoretical constructs, seeking to extend these, in what Burawoy has called “reconstruction” or “theoretical refinement” (1998:15).

Following Bernstein (1996:136), I understand work undertaken on the etic plane as involving the development of a language of description, abstracting the empirical material observed on the emic plane, bringing it into a set of principled conceptual relations. The development of a language of description is well suited to the ethnographic approach taken in this thesis in that as Burawoy suggests: “we do not worry about the uniqueness of our case since we are not as interested in its representativeness as its contribution to reconstructing theory” (1998:15). In this thesis the three problems that I engage with in each chapter act as devices for translating between these two planes.

In this chapter I present the development of the language of description showing how each element emerges from an analytical exploration of the three key problems. The elements that I propose in the language of description are not distinctly related to one or other problem but address the problems in overlapping ways or even simultaneously. I draw distinctions between them in order to present the arguments logically and to cover the ground systematically. After introducing the elements connected with each problem I discuss each element with reference to the data from the trajectory (called “recording activeness”) that is the subject of this chapter. I have abbreviated the three key problems in the following way:

<b>1. FLOW</b>	The need to move to an understanding of flows as sequences of events rather than single instance events
<b>2. CONTEXT/ PRACTICES</b>	The need to de-limit the boundaries of context in order to specify what inferences can be made about practices
<b>3. MULTIMODALITY</b>	The need to shift from a linguistic frame of reference to multi-modality and semiotics as the frame of reference

*Figure 6.1: Summary of key problems*

The problems and the associated elements of the language of description are presented in the following table:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Element in LoD</b>	<b>Illustrative data from (Trajectory three)</b>
<b>1. FLOW</b>	Events and nodes	Strip 1
	Strip	Strips 1 and A
	Trajectory	Strips 5 and 6
<b>2.CONTEXT/PRACTICES</b>	Activity system	Across all strips
	Actors and their objectives	"
	Other participants/rules/division of labour	"
<b>3. MULTIMODALITY</b>	Mediational means	Across all strips

*Figure 6.2: Elements in the language of description:*

**Problem One: The need to move towards an understanding of flows as sequences of events rather than single instance events**

Elements in the language of description related to this problem are nodes, strips and trajectories. Each of these is now presented and argued for.

**Node**

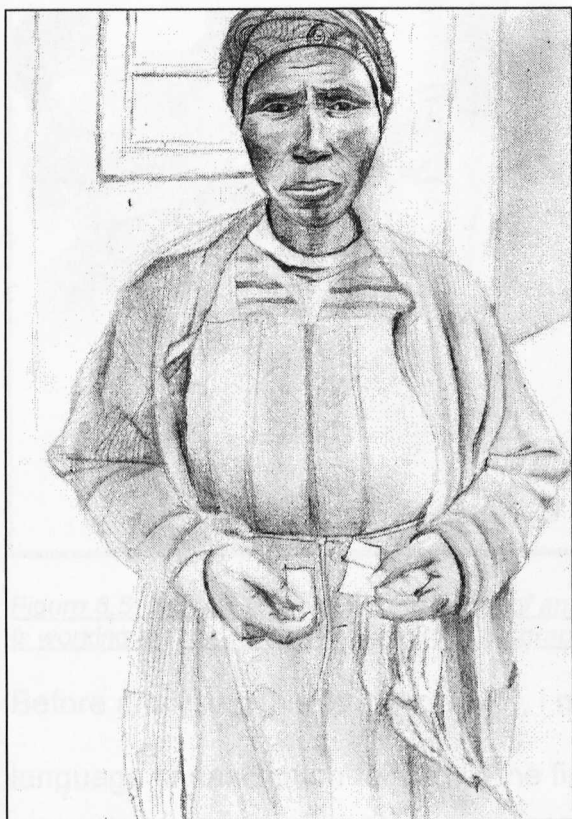
The smallest element in the language of description is the node, as was presented and discussed in Chapter Five. The concept was derived from an analysis of the data presented in Chapters Four and Five, and a working definition of this concept was arrived at: The interactional moment at which a ‘join’ is created or comes into play, and where mediational means (discussed further below) are specifically chosen or drawn on by actors to further their meaning making processes. This moment, which can be one of either choice or constraint, is an aspect of what Kress calls the “design” of communication. It can prefigure the “production” of communication (even if only by a split second). In order to relate this concept back

to the emic plane I will present one piece of the data from strip 1, it is the second field note in this strip (numbered 1.2).

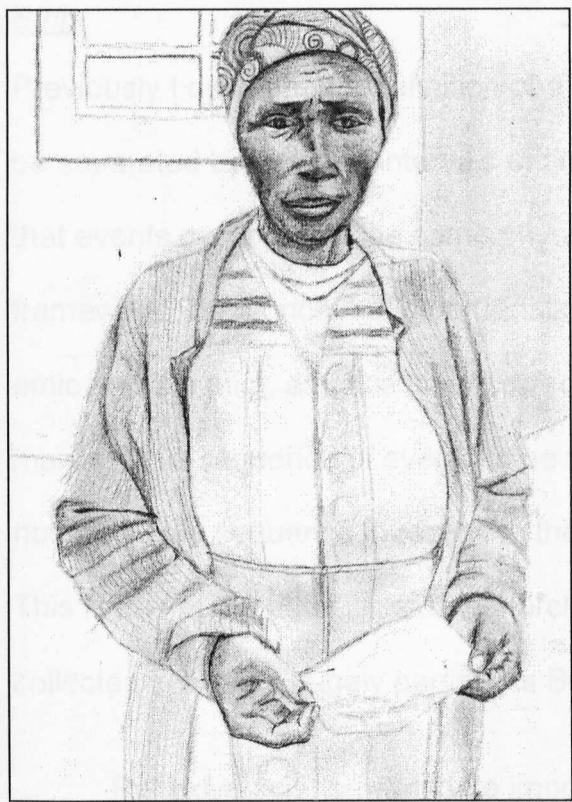
The field note records an event on the site (some distance from the garage and at the side of a shed where the skins of slaughtered sheep were still sometimes hung up to dry). The group had been making concrete blocks in this space to use in the house building. This was back-breaking work and potential house builders were required to take part in it to show their “activeness”. The field-note was not dated but I estimate it to be in mid-August, 1998. A sequence of moments in the event can be seen in the figures below (drawn from photographs that I took at the time).

*Strip 1.2 (undated)*

*A group of women are around the tap filling containers of water. A ragged group of elderly women had earlier arrived on the site. I had never seen them before, and they appeared as really being amongst the “poorest of the poor”. Two of them asked for Nomhle. I notice Nomhle coming over with her books in hand, which I now recognise. The one is an old A4 executive diary from 1997 with gold corners. She uses that one for notes she makes at HASSOC meetings. The other is her black and white hard-cover she uses for roll-call and lists. She stands in the centre of the area and in a few minutes there are about seven people around her. The two old mamas close in, I watch with fascination as one takes a small cloth out of her dress and starts to unwind it. I am wondering whether it has money in it, it looks like it from the way she carefully unwinds it. No, it is two small pieces of paper folded into tiny squares and she slowly unfolds them and hands them over to Nomhle.. On them are written names (Busi and Nomi’s names) which Nomhle reads out (the elderly women were not able to read them) and clarifies verbally that the two women have come to work on behalf of Busi and Nomi who are both members of Khayaletu. Nomhle then writes down the full names of Busi and Nomi on her list which was kept in the back pages of the black notebook.*



*Figure 6.3: The old woman unwinds the handkerchief with the two folded scraps of paper on which are written the names of Busi and Nomi*



*Figure 6.4: The old woman has unfolded the one scrap and lifts it for Nomhle*



*Figure 6.5: Nomhle takes down the name of another Khayaletu member for whom the young man is working that day (I was not able to photograph her taking down Busi and Nomi's names)*

Before analysing this strip, however, I move onto the second element in the language of description related to the first problem of **flows**, this is the concept of **strip**.

### Strip

Previously I developed a definition of a strip as a sequence of activities that may be separated by different intervals of time, but the strip is characterised by the fact that events occur within the same physical space, within the same participant framework. The concept of strip translates between the two planes of analysis (the emic and the etic), and it is an imperfect translation. The concept enables the data making up a sequence of events to be transcribed by the analyst, but this data is not the whole sequence in reality, in the emic, lived experiences of the researched. This is one of the difficulties of researching naturally occurring processes – data collected is always hugely partial. As Burawoy (1998:15) says:

Reflexive science would be impossibly cumbersome if its goal were the display of multiple narratives, multiple voices. But worse still, situational knowledge is knowledge located in a specific space and time. Neither space nor time can be frozen and so situational knowledges are in continual flux. Therefore like any other science, reflexive science has to perform some reduction. In this instance the reduction is an aggregation – the aggregation of situational knowledge into social process.

The concept of the strip enables the researcher to discover some continuity between the events transcribed as data, and this continuity is provided by the definition of the elements of the strip needing to be held constant if the strip is to have validity. These are: participant framework and space. I will now re-present the data above (containing the node) within the strip in which it was situated.

*Strip 1.1 (04/08/98) Much activity at the block-making site. I am shown the book which is now the register. For about ten days Zukiswa has been keeping a list. The list on the wall of the space did not work because people could just fill their name in and then not work. Now that the first ten are decided on, the issue of who is working becomes crucial. I get the feeling the book is normally kept by someone else (probably Nomhle) but she is attending a meeting at HASSOC.*

*Someone joins in at 12.30 and does not ensure that her name is written down initially. I notice that 2 or three people check their watches. I mention it to Zukiswa and she beckons the person who has now been joined by another. Zukiswa takes down their names. She does not know them, they are from Khayaletu2. Zukiswa picks up her book, says we're going to lunch at 1.00. I walk over with her and she tells me that she sleeps on site two nights and two days per week. She was upset with the earlier woman because she is one of the first ten to build and she is building a 72 square metres house needing 2000 blocks, but she hasn't been doing the work.*

The second field-note (presented above, when the two old women arrived with the notes) makes up strip 1.2:

*1.2 (undated) The two elderly women arrive on site, as explained above.*

The third field note is taken from a meeting probably a few days later:

*1.3 19/08/98 Thembi gets up, picks up a piece of cardboard torn from a box of tea with names written in pencil on it. Takes pen from Linda. ....*

*Thembi is busy copying names off the two pieces of cardboard in a notebook in three columns, using the cardboard as a ruler. The columns are for Name / In / Out with numbers and names written underneath. Usually this is Nomhle's task but she is away.*

A final field note in this strip is taken verbatim from Nonhutu's notebook (this is not dated but is probably in early October 1998). It notes a couple of different events:

*1.4 (undated) Nomhle is responsible for keeping the register of people coming to work daily at the site. There is a member responsible each day to record workers but Nomhle has to transfer that to the big book she keeps. She says she does not like to see other people's hand-writing in her book. In this book are columns with names, group, date, time-in and time-out. Some of the members are not as dedicated to this task of recording daily attendance and yet it is an invaluable form of data for allocation purposes.*

*One day Zukiswa was on duty, she was on the site and this happened:*

*Zukiswa: I have been here since 8 this morning and it is now 3. I don't know where everybody (MC) is, I am going now. She took off her pinafore, wiping dust off her face.*

*Veliswa: In everything you are doing please take my name down. I don't want a single mistake with my attendance.*

*Zukiswa: Yhu! I forgot about that. She grabbed one of the booklets [these were the booklets that had been printed for the feast mentioned in Chapter Four and that were randomly lying on a bench: CK] and asked for a pen from me. She walked over to the site. She started to write those she could see, and the people started to come close to her seeing that she had the booklet with her).*

*Isaac: What about those that left already?*

*Zukiswa: It is not yet 4, so they are supposed to be here still.*

*If it was not because of Veliswa reminding her, Zukiswa would have forgotten and there would have been no record for that day.*

*One day MamaSingana said "I have come across this piece of paper (showing it to the group). I don't know whether the names here in which mine happens to be were copied to the attendance record book". The paper went round and people looked to see whether they were there or not. The three young women looked at the paper and said "it is funny that we are not in this paper because I remember that we were present on this day as well if I could remember from the date". One responded by saying "Ma'Singana can't you remember that we were there and the first people to come on site that day, remember, you were changing the nappy of Noxolo's baby?" MamaSingana replied "I do remember". The paper was given to Nomhle to check whether those names did appear on that particular date. The paper was in very bad shape and dirty. Nomhle took the paper and said she is going to check against her book.*

The above is the recorded data available to me for constructing this strip. (I did of course also have much that wasn't recorded, but that has become almost autobiographical in the sense that Blommaert [2001a] talks about, consisting of memories of fragments of talk, sensory impressions, interpretations of photographs taken at the time and so on). I argue that the material above can legitimately be grouped into a strip on the basis that although the events take place at differing intervals of time, they take place within the same space and participant framework.

Of crucial interest is the fact that at the node occurring within 1.2, participants invoked an earlier strip. I do not have data on this strip and it occurs within a different participant framework, time and space. This was the neighbourhood-based interaction between Busi and Nomi and the two elderly women who first appear in field note 1.2, at the node. I do not know how the interaction took place but can assume that the four women were all present, and that the note containing the two names was then written, accompanied by an explanation of the necessary steps in the process. I can also assume that there were many similar strips as

individual members of Khayaletu recruited others to stand in for them. I have called this strip A, and I will explain the reasons for this later.

I will now turn to the further element in the language of description related to the first problem, the trajectory.

### Trajectory

The term trajectory, and the concept that it represents, has a set of differing theoretical origins. The dominant influence on my choice of this concept is the work of Silverstein and Urban (1996) and Blommaert (2001; 2004), both of which are located within linguistic anthropology. However, the term used by these writers is “text trajectories”. I have chosen to steer away from limiting the scope of the concept of trajectory with the descriptor “text”. In drawing on a second source of influence, the work of Engeström in particular and others working with activity theory, I have conceptualised communication as activity, and activity as being undertaken through mediational means (artifacts, tools, signs) of whatever type. In the context of this thesis, these mediational means are drawn on in entextualisation processes and the text-artifacts produced. As discussed in Chapter Two the definition of text is highly contested. Furthermore, distinguishing between discourse and text, and between discourse and entextualisation is a contested area that does not seem to me to be resolved by current research. For this reason, I have steered clear of the term “text trajectories” and stayed with the idea of “meaning making trajectories”. The final influence on my choice of the term and the concept is the work of Kress (in Meinhof and Smith, 2000) and Iedema (1999, 2001). Both of these writers put forward the idea that shifts across what they call “contexts” (or “discourses” or sometimes “practices”) involve the achievement of more durable forms of meaning making. This is explored in more detail below.



The concept of a meaning-making trajectory puts intention and agency at the centre of the analysis. While I am aware of the difficulties of defining intention, and that this may be a weakness in my overall framework, the concept of trajectory is a heuristic, a way of limiting focus. Agency is a property of actors engaging in communication, sometimes freely, sometimes constrained, sometimes with total regimentation (Wortham and Rymes, 2003), sometimes emergent (Hymes, in Headland et al,1990).

As a *heuristic* the concept enables a move away from an emphasis on literacy events and a move towards conceptualising the literacy related “stuff” as secondary to the meaning making “stuff”, whichever mode of communication it may assume. In most cases, meaning is made by being carried across contexts; it carries a history and projects a future, but the meaning is made by people and their interactions and is recognised and realised (Bernstein, 1996) only within contexts.

In order to illustrate the relation between nodes, strips and trajectories, I will now present a further set of strips in what I have defined as the “recording activeness” trajectory. These will be presented in the form of field notes but the following table will help to situate the steps.

Strip	Timescale	Place	Events	Participants
A. Recruitment of women (no direct observations)	Not known, probably between 10 minutes and one hour	Neighbourhood, outside Khayaletu	Busi and Nomi ask the two elderly women to do a day's work for them, explain the process, write the names on a scrap of paper	Busi, Nomi, the two women.
1. Recording names on site (a number of events observed and recorded)	Around seven months (concurrently with strip 2)	At block-making site	Nomhle and others record names of people working	Nomhle, Zukiswa, general membership, substitute labour.

2. Writing list from record of names (some indirect observations)	Around the same as strip 1 (concurrently with strip 1)	In Nomhle's house and other sites in Khayaletu	Nomhle writes out list from record of names	Nomhle, perhaps other general members or MC members
3. Tabulating list for comparison (no observations)	(no data)	(no data)	(no data)	MamaToleni, MamaKhanyisa
4. Assessing activeness on basis of comparison (no direct observations)	A few days, if at all (no data)	At HASSOC office	HASSOC officials scrutinise lists	HASSOC officials
5. Decision making about allocation of sites (observed)	One one-hour meeting	On grassy patch at Khayaletu	Meeting conducted by HASSOC officials, decision conveyed verbally	HASSOC officials, Khayaletu MC members, Khayaletu General membership
6. Allocation of sites to individuals from list (observed)	One four-hour meeting	In garage	General Khayaletu meeting, complex listing, naming, recording	Khayaletu General membership and MC
7. Resolving of the list (a number of episodes)	Over a few days	Various sites in Khayaletu	Combining, compiling final list	MC, Khayaletu General and Nonthutu

*Figure 6.6: Strips in the "recording activeness" trajectory*

I did not have any direct observations of strips 2, 3 or 4 in this trajectory, but I do have the following field note for strip 5.

*5. 21/11/98 People (perhaps 160 altogether) gathered slowly on the grassy patch from lunchtime for the 2pm meeting, and there was an air of nervousness and anticipation. At about 3pm MamaKhanyisa (MC member) asked me to drive her and others over HASSOC to find the HASSOC members who were supposed to be doing the allocations. There were all sorts of delays there. Eventually HASSOC officials arrived at 4pm with no allocation list, but a set of... "enumeration forms". (The officials were installed at a table at the front of the assembled gathering of about 150 people). We (the meeting) were told that there had been a misunderstanding and this prior step in the process (filling in the enumeration forms) had been omitted. The HASSOC official explained that they hadn't come to a decision about the allocation because the "books" of KH2 (apparently this meant the savings books) had not been kept properly and they would have to go through them again. Also "activeness" (meaning the attendance at meetings and at daily working sessions on site) had been very bad. Yho, yho! People were then asked to make four queues to the four officials who then filled the enumeration forms in by interviewing each person briefly. They were then told they would have to wait until these forms were processed. People left with a sense of disappointment and anger. I even found myself feeling angry and mystified.*

For months afterwards there was the anticipation that a site allocation meeting would be held and, in fact, some meetings were held at which people expected to be allocated sites. There was a sense of mystery about this, with much talk about

lists and plans. People constantly asked each other if they knew anything about the list or had seen the plan, but nobody had. Rumours then circulated that there was a list, and people became anxious and mistrustful about it.

Finally a site allocation meeting was announced. The field notes below are compiled from both Nonthutu's and my notes. They capture the events of this meeting, which it should be noted, took place almost five months after the last field note. I have broken it down into sections for ease of reading rather than for purposes of analysis. (We were not able to take down the names of people speaking as we were writing the notes by hand):

*6.1 17/04/99 (around 2pm) Over 100 people are present and are spilling out of the door of the garage. The MC members enter about 45 minutes after the start of the meeting. In the meantime other issues are discussed by members while waiting, the allocation keeps being returned to:*

*What about the list?*

*Can I say something? We were told that we would be listed based on certain things. Management is supposed to be responsible for that.*

*How will we know if it is someone from KH1, who will come first and last on the list?*

*We must come with a decision, we are not sitting here with umlungus (white people) who will tell us what to do. We must come with our own decisions about this<sup>50</sup>.*

*What about using the roll-call? Maybe we can use the roll-call if we don't have the list.*

*There's a problem with the roll-call. Not everyone is in the roll-call, but sometimes you're here and no-one writes your name down.*

*And from the book we sometimes don't know the surnames from people, people know me as Nyami, not with my surname<sup>51</sup>.*

*6.2 (around 2.20PM) (A worn architect's layout plan is stuck onto the wall.)*

*We have to have the list of the people.*

*From KH1 we already have a list.*

*How did you know? You are prepared and we are not.*

*There is also the problem of the people who are not supposed to be on this land<sup>52</sup>.*

*Who is eligible?*

*We know each other, from KH2, even if we don't have a list.*

*But we can't cope with the problem, and there is going to be no progress again.*

<sup>50</sup> This reflects the participatory development discourse about people needing to take decisions and work out processes for themselves.

<sup>51</sup> This statement relates back to my earlier claims about why Busi and Nomi asked the two women to take the paper with their names to Nomhle – there was a lack of clarity about which names people used.

<sup>52</sup> Some Khayaletu members continued to be members of the savings club but also put their names down and applied for subsidies for houses in a different (non-HASSOC related) development.

*We must all go out and come in one by one.  
But if we have a list then we are saying that these are the people whether they are now present or not present.  
We must go and demand the list from MamaToleni.  
MamaToleni is busy<sup>53</sup>.  
(Roar of disapproval and muttering, clicking of tongues and shaking of heads.)  
Haai (No), man, haai (No), we must go now (meaning we must go and fetch her physically).*

6.3 (around 2.45pm) Then the Management Committee members arrive (and without saying anything, move to the plan on the wall) and write numbers on the sites on the plan, starting from 20, but these seem to be arbitrarily placed on the sites<sup>54</sup>.  
MamaKhanyisa has a KH1 list of names written by hand in her notebook. Nomhle has the KH2 list of names written by hand on a notepad. MamaK shouts out a name (from her list) which is then shouted outside the garage door, the person enters and looks at the layout for a minute or two and then indicates by pointing on the plan where they want their site to be. MamaToleni (the Chair of the Management Committee) writes the number shouted out by MamaK onto the person's chosen site, then she seems to be saying remember this number, but takes up a red felt pen and writes it on the inside of the person's forearm, but this is not very clear on people's dark skins. Sometimes it gets written twice on both hands. Then Nomhle shouts out a name from her list, so it goes one by one from KH1 and KH2<sup>55</sup>.  
People walk out studying their arms, as if the number has a magic, as if committing it to memory. MamaK's list is numbered from 1 to 117, but she is not taking the names in that order, she moves back and forth between the three pages of the list, choosing in a way that looks random to me (presumably it is based on her decisions about "activeness"). Someone is whispering in her ear and pointing to names on the list. As she shouts the name, she ticks the person's number on her list. But she does not write down on her list the new number which the person is given on the plan. The same process occurs with Nomhle. So there is no record, because there is no clarity whether the number belongs to someone from KH1 or KH2, other than on people's hands, and on the architect's plan, of what site numbers people have been given<sup>56</sup>.  
There are some murmurings but mainly people follow the process, laughing a little, being greeted by their friends and scrutinising their numbers as they leave the garage. Someone tells me they are

<sup>53</sup> Nonthutu had been at MamaToleni's house earlier and whispered to me that MamaToleni had told her that she was busy with a family ritual. Both of us therefore waited with bated breath to see what would happen.

<sup>54</sup> Nonthutu and I immediately noticed that instead of writing plot numbers thus:

21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30

The numbers were written thus (and some sites were not numbered):

23		42	61	27
54	25	39		28

This is a diagrammatic reconstruction of one block of sites. But the architect's plan contained about 25 blocks of sites so the random numbering spanned across these blocks. The implication was that if the sites and blocks were not numbered consecutively there was some unknown process whereby certain sites had already been both chosen and allocated. The numbering of the plots in this way was not commented on by anyone. The numbers started at 20, as the houses on these sites were almost complete.

<sup>55</sup> I quote from fieldnotes: *The numbers, however, are not sequential as MamaKhanyisa is choosing randomly from her list and nobody is drawing up a new list. So, for example, if she calls MamaQole, who is, say 102, on her list for KH1 MamaToleni then knows what number she is up to on the plan, say 43. She writes 43 on MamaQole's arm, but she does not write MamaQole's name on the plan, nor does anyone else take down the fact that MamaQole is now number 43 in the combined list. Next, Nomhle shouts out Kesslina Faye who is number 83 on her list of KH2 members. When Kesslina goes to the plan MamaToleni gives her the number 44, writes it on the plan and on Kesslina's arm, but she does not write Kesslina's name on the plan nor does Nomhle write the number 44 next to her name, nor is anyone else starting a new combined list. Nonthutu had been quietly trying to write the list.*

<sup>56</sup> At first I was sure that I was simply missing something. The fact that no-one remarked on this added to my confusion. Later Nonthutu and I realised that we had both had the same experience.

The final strip contains the events that took place on site after the allocation meeting, but is not detailed here so as not to distract attention<sup>57</sup>. It is worth noting however, as it has an impact on what is covered in Chapter Seven.

These trajectories took place at the junction of the first phase and the second phase of my involvement at Khayaletu. The events that make up these trajectories played a role in constructing what I have identified as the shift from Phase One to Phase Two.

In tracing the events of this trajectory and the one in Chapter 7 therefore, I also trace a wider history of the house building process, exploring the relation between events and processes, and demonstrating the ways in which these relations both structure, and are structured by, broader social and historical forces and dynamics.

### **Problem Two: The need to de-limit the boundaries of context in order to specify what inferences can be made about practices**

The main element of the language of description relating to this problem is the concept of activity system.

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<sup>57</sup> Field notes for strip 7 are as follows:

7.1 19/04/99 Mam'uQole: "SisNthutu, please can you show us this list? We don't know a thing". Before I could respond I heard that Thandiwe had asked me to go to her house. I was shocked. I went, she asked me about the list because members in her group want to know their numbers because what they had written on their hands has been rubbed off. I sat down with her and I copy the one she had, and gave her my list for her to copy. She complained that there are KH1 members who claim KH2 numbers. She said that KH2 had even numbers and KH1 must have odd numbers, but there are KH1 members who are given even numbers. Back to Mam'uQole – I told them I didn't have the full list. I promised that I am going to Mam'uKhanyisa and get the list and I will make a copy for them. I went to MamaToleni and Mam'uKhanyisa – she refused to let me have the list. I told her that I won't go with it but I will just copy what she have as I did with Thandiwe. . She told me her list still needed to be fixed, there are some mistakes. I kept on saying it is fine as if it is a draft then she can have the list fixed later. She refused.

7.2 20/04/99

Everywhere people are working on site, measuring out plots. . A member of the FSO arrived looking for someone. He saw MamaToleni and said "MamaToleni I am telling you if those councillors can come here and see what you are doing they will freak out. You are not supposed to be building here. Yes, for the first twenty it was all right but this is scaring me".

MamaToleni: "I am worried that after the elections there won't be any subsidies approved".

### Activity systems

Context is conceived as activity system, accomplished in action and integrally related to precise actions and processes; rather than as a given, a container surrounding action and process. Given this integral relation it is now more possible to limit what counts as context and what data is relevant.

According to Brandt and Clinton (2002) the most critical reversal of the autonomous model undertaken by “revisionist scholars” presumably within the NLS tradition, put context at the centre of understandings about literacy. They argue however, that privileging the local context as the only relevant context creates a new “great divide” between local and global. Now, I have a more modest question to ask of my own data here. If I were to conceptualise the location and events in strip 1.2 as “a context” with the literacy events described in them as “contextualised” how exactly do I account for the presence of the two elderly women and their twisted scraps of paper? The two women came “bearing” this text from a different prior context that was not observable.

From the emic perspective what are the ties between the two contexts of strip A and strip 1? From the perspective of Khayaletu members the dialogue between Nomhle and the two women established the purpose of their presence on site. The two women were not known to Nomhle. Furthermore, as Nomhle was a KH2 member and Busi and Nomi were KH1 members, Busi and Nomi themselves were probably not known to Nomhle (this seemed apparent in the short discussion that I observed). This is where the neatly folded scraps of paper inside the cloth came into it. Busi and Nomi wanted to ensure that their names and surnames were registered. The paper with the names acted as a symbolic token, representing and hopefully confirming, the replacement of Busi and Nomi’s bodily presence on site.

The difficult question is why the two elderly women could not “speak” the names of Busi and Nomi in order for them to be recorded and why they needed to be conveyed in written form. It is likely that Busi and Nomi knew that the two women were not able to read and write and would not be able to confirm that Nomhle had written their names down correctly. It is also likely that Busi and Nomi could have been known to the two elderly women by different names (i.e. clan names, nicknames) than they needed to be known as for documentation purposes. A third reason may have been that perhaps they didn’t trust Nomhle to inscribe the names if they were only spoken. As we saw in strip 1.3, there were many gaps and possible failings in the recording system. High levels of trust were needed but again, were not guaranteed.

The note therefore created a material join between the two activity systems making up strip A and strip 1. It substituted for a possible verbal join. The participants could perhaps have ‘made do’ with the verbal, but because of the risks involved, opted for the written.

But that would only be a description. How would I establish the relevance of the event itself and of my description of it? In addition, there was a multiplicity of other events going on in the block making site at exactly the same time, all of which I observed and some of which I noted. (These may have included the delivery of raw materials like cement, the learning about and operating of the concrete mixer, the drawing of electricity from a distant and unreliable source, the fact that Margaret from the SO kept coming in to check the mixture of the concrete, the fact that someone was sent off to buy oranges at the stall nearby.) Each of these events (a number of which drew on reading, writing or numeracy, and a number of which drew on visual and spatial forms of communication as well) drew on other prior events that took place in different contexts. Most of the entextualisation

processes would have drawn on earlier events from other contexts, and most of the text-artifacts present would have acted as joins between contexts as well. If I were to make claims about literacy practices from this snapshot of this context I would not know which of these prior contexts would be relevant because I have no clear criteria on which to base claims about relevance. This is the problem of infinite regress discussed in Chapter Two, and it resonates with my problem four (which I discuss in the conclusion).

Extracting the actual literacy events from each strip in each of the trajectories studied shows the difficulties in making inferences about practices. Certainly the traces of literacy are evident in each strip. But there is great variability across the strips and sometimes literacy is not chosen as a mode of communicating meaning, but, as shown in MamaSolani's case, bodily action for example (as in the physical "occupation" of the shed with the concrete blocks). Street's definition of a literacy practice as a "broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (2003: 2) is difficult to apply when studying the uses and valuing of literacy across this trajectory. Each strip contains evidence of different and variable uses and valuing.

However, to take just strip A and strip 1 again, when the two activity systems (within which the strips are situated) are identified, and when the meaning making trajectory is overlaid onto the activity system, it becomes possible to establish relevance and make claims about practices. Understanding the relation between the activity system and the meaning-making trajectory therefore is crucial. I demonstrate in each of the trajectories identified in this thesis, that the same meanings can be carried across activity systems in different modes (using different mediational means). It is an analysis of the *crossing* that allows for the variability of practices to be perceived. Crossing and recontextualisation are tightly intertwined.



The node is the point at which the crossing is made, and under certain circumstances the recontextualisation of meaning takes place. These circumstances are provided by the relations between the elements in the activity system, and the circulation of the metadiscourses in and around the system. The comparison between the two systems enables the conditions of the crossing and of the recontextualisation to be revealed. It is in this comparison that issues of inequality become central.

But there is no guarantee that the meaning will be recognised and new meanings realised in the recontextualisation. This depends on what happens in the node.

This node is defined by the ongoing chaining of the meaning of “recording activeness” and is brought into existence, for example, when the woman pulled out the cloth with the note from her shirt and the discussion about what they were there for began. The fact that the concrete mix was being tested at the same time, or that cash was being pooled for the purchase of oranges (each of which had its own set of antecedent events emerging from interactions in prior activity systems) did not *articulate* in the recording activeness node. ***I claim that it is on this basis that the relevance of context can be established.***

I will now go into the mediational means in detail as a way of clarifying further elements in the language of description and addressing Problem Three.

### **Problem Three: The need to shift from a linguistic frame of reference to multi modality and semiotics as the frame of reference**

In the language of description as mentioned above, the term introduced is mediational means. These are often described as tools, I have suggested that they can be conceptualised as resources. Russell (1997:511) argues that:

Tools (mediational means) refer to material objects in use by some individual or group to accomplish some action with some outcome – that is

tools-in-use, ...a material thing is not a tool unless it has been put to some use... The use of tools (including vocalising and marking) and – most important – the division of labour enabled by tools mediate human interactions, separating biological motives from the socially constructed object/motive of activity.

However, Cole argues that artifacts are both ideal and material, "...they are ideal in that their material form has been shaped by their participation in the interactions of which they were previously a part and which they mediate in the present" (Cole 1996:117)

### What's in a text?

One of the most difficult questions in this thesis and in the field of study generally is the question: "what is a text?" I had many long transcriptions of meeting procedures. I am aware that these transcriptions are research texts in themselves (see in particular, Silverstein and Urban 1996), but I wanted to be clear about what could be described as a text on the plane that I have described as emic, if at all possible. If my framework was to shift from the linguistic to the semiotic or multimodal, what would this mean for my understanding of text?

In Kress (in Meinhof and Smith, 2000) there appear to be somewhat contradictory approaches to this question. Firstly, he states that:

...language always occurs as text: as speakers we participate in making texts, and we do as hearers also. Texts are social – whether text in the making, or text as completed, material object – reflecting the purposes of their makers and the social characteristics of the environments in which they were made. Consequently we always encounter language as text, and we encounter text in generic form (p133).

But shortly after that he raises the question of flows and of boundaries: "the flow and the dynamics of meaning in the complex social environments in which I find myself are **the basis of text**, a constantly shifting flow of meanings...(p134)" (*my emphasis – CK*). He then states that the "boundaries of text are not the boundaries of meaning making" and that the "text and its boundaries do not stop this process

of semiosis: they provide a punctuation only". In this approach "semiosis is ongoing, ceaseless: it is punctuated as textual forms, produced in the environments of particular social occasions" (p135). Kress himself argues, however, that in this ongoing semiosis participants have a choice about what mode they can draw on to 'fix' their meanings in. A text can therefore be produced in a mode other than the linguistic.

To take a step back, into the etic plane. Silverstein and Urban (1996:1) explore various levels at which texts can be perceived and analysed. The first is as "a trope for culture", an "autonomously meaningful object", understood in "the sense of an ensemble of shared symbols and meanings", "deprocessualised" and able to be "transmitted across social boundaries without regard for the kinds of recontextualisations it might undergo". Silverstein and Urban, naturally, as anthropologists, suggest that this view of text is "epistemologically suspect" (p2). It may be noted that this perspective is deeply intertwined with Street's "autonomous model of literacy".

A highly reflexive twist in Silverstein and Urban's argument follows, however, when they point out: "this utility of texts is precisely what "the natives" (including us) see as well. They engage in processes of entextualisation to create a seemingly sharable transmittable culture" (p2) by taking some fragment of discourse and quoting it anew, or transcribing a fragment of oral discourse into a seemingly more durable, decontextualised form, or taking a durable text and reanimating it through performance. In this sense then, they suggest that text can be seen as "a metadiscursive construct", ...useful to participants in a culture as "a way of creating an image of a durable, shared culture immanent in or even undifferentiated from its ensemble of realised or even potential texts". In the book, however, they state that their "brand of ethnography focuses squarely on

entextualisation processes rather than or in addition to texts, on the “contextually contingent semiotic processes involved in achieving text...”(p2). They also draw attention to the idea of differentiating between the idea of culture as text, the entextualisation process and the text-artifact.

In an echo of the dilemmas described with Kress’s position above, the authors suggest that text can be seen as an outcome of a process in which “discourse metamorphoses and precipitates as form”, in this case, “text is seen through text-artifact and comes to be opposed to discourse, as decontextualised as opposed to contextualised” (p4). However, they suggest that the context of entextualisation affects one’s orientation to the source discourse and also the shape of the text produced, with the possibility that: “the metadiscursive understanding of the discourse process of entextualisation involves assessments of participants’ power and authority, such that entextualisation both reflects and constitutes asymmetrical social relations” (p4).

#### *What’s in a ‘recontextualisation’?*

Likewise, the focus of this thesis is on entextualisation, but more importantly, on recontextualisation. Because recontextualisation depends on the ways in which the prior meaning was constructed, the role of the text-artifact is crucial. The text-artifact indexes the meanings it carries from the prior context, and points to the new context in which meaning is being created as the artifact is being recontextualised. This is the material expression of “the join”. However, whether the meaning is recognised and realised is contingent on the social conditions operating at the node in which it is recontextualised.

I will revisit the concept of design to explore this further. To test it out in the recording activeness trajectory, I take the first crossing between strip A and strip 1.

Busi and Nomi knew that they needed to project their intentions from the context of strip A into the context of strip 1 and that the interactions in strip 1.2 would, most likely, accommodate those intentions. However, there were few resources for this form of projection. So they took what was to hand, a pencil, a scrap of paper, their own names, the old women and to put it crudely, their bodies and their bra-straps, by means of which the meaning safely crossed contexts and was recontextualised in the necessary activity system for its meaning to be realised. Its entry formed a node, and I will now explore this.

Strip 1.2 was characterised by high levels of contestation. The field notes (above) capture the kinds of comments and debates that took place. (I will never forget the intense anxiety in the physical demeanour and facial expressions of the two elderly women – the illustration in Figure 6.5 somewhat captures this). Busi and Nomi did not have access to the context where they could observe and check the recording of their names or record their names themselves. They sent the two elderly women, who were not able to read and write, and they depended on Nomhle to take down the names on the papers accurately. Busi and Nomi knew the two elderly women could not scrutinise what Nomhle wrote and correct it, if necessary. But the two elderly women lacked authority. They were silenced; it was only their labour power that was needed, they did not speak unless questioned and were unable to play a role in monitoring the recording of the names. Although Nomhle was not unkind to them, she was officious and struck up a pose with the notebook and pen, interrogating them as to their intentions, scrutinising their note, and eventually taking down the names and allowing them to work.

On the other hand, there was a more complicated dynamic with Veliswa and Zukiswa in strip 1.4. Zukiswa was collecting names that day and was due to pass them on to Nomhle. Although Veliswa was present on site and able to read and

write her own name she, surprisingly, seemed content to delegate that task to Zukiswa, but asserted that she did not want any mistakes.

However, also in 1.4, MamaSingana raised a question and the three younger women noted that there was a mistake, which Nomhle undertook to check. Nomhle was insistent that she did not like to see different people's handwriting in her record book. There was therefore another recontextualisation when she rewrote the names that were usually collected on scraps of paper into her own notebook, and this is what makes up strip 2.

What literacy is, in this context, needs to be clarified. All entextualisation processes took place within participant frameworks in each activity system. Each participant framework was mediated by the outside elements of the activity system – mediational means, rules and division of labour. With regard to the mediational means, the communicative mode available was the linguistic (both spoken and written). The media available in that mode were the pen and paper. The text-artifact thus produced was the 'list' of two names. The semiotic resources drawn on by Busi and Nomi involved code-breaking (they wrote down their own names); pragmatic and semantic (they knew that they needed to write down the name that was recorded in their original subsidy application, not their clan name or their nicknames; that the old women could not read or write and that a material text would be a safer guarantee of getting their names recorded).

MODE	MEDIA	TEXT-ARTIFACT (material form and genre)	RESOURCES
linguistic	pen and paper	list/note (two names)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>code-breaking</li><li>pragmatic</li><li>semantic</li></ul>

Figure 6.7: Mediational means available in Strip A

## Translation across contexts and the achievement of “facticity”

The joining of meaning making across the activity systems is a complex attenuated transaction involving: the verbal interactions around the buying of the women’s labour power, translating into the writing of the note with the names; then the note being transformed into a list which translates into a recording process to be standardised. This was done in order for *material presence* to be compared in order for presence to be translated into “*activeness*” (we did see however that none of these processes were straightforward nor were they predictable). In addition, there was no clear sense that they were leading to more durable forms of meaning making. Plots were finally allocated, but the fieldnotes in footnote 10 show that this was a risky and tenuous process, which nearly jeopardised the whole development. I will deal with the aftermath of this in the next Chapter.

Strip A. Verbalisation of names (Busi and Nomi) and writing of text

Strip 1.2. Presentation of scrap of paper with written names and writing of names in Nomhle’s book

Strip 2. Nomhle re-writes list in her own book in her own writing

Strip 3. No data but presumably preparation of a table comparing activeness

Strip 4. No data but presumably reading of table of comparison with regard to activeness as criterion for decisions to be made about allocations

Strip 5. Decision conveyed that activeness not good enough

Strip 6. Allocation of sites, numbers on plan and on arms

Kress (in Meinhof and Smith, 2000:139) touches on this process of “transformation” by exploring a text and examining traces of earlier interactions which led to particular textual elements being chosen and expressed by the producer: “The textual elements assembled in this text existed at some earlier stage in this process of semiosis, as elements of other texts; they are here in variously transformed manner”. He compares two textual features and claims that

in the case of one: “Clearly...the transformation of prior textual elements is **heavier** (*my emphasis – CK*), largely because it is likely to be the result of a *series* of intervening transformations via other texts” whereas in the other case the textual element had been subject to the transformative action of one textual agent only, namely the reporter or writer of the text” (ibid:139).

The trajectories presented in this thesis show that such “transformative actions” are not undertaken by individuals acting on or with texts, but are complex actions taking place within participant frameworks. These are mediated by various means, and the mediation is given historical specificity by the available mediational means, the rules in operation at the time, and the division of labour.

In considering a meaning making process such as “recording activeness” I assess the claims made by Iedema about the establishment of “facticity” or “fact-construction” (2001:25). Iedema draws extensively on Latour, suggesting that projects (or purposes) increasingly abstract “meanings away from issues of localized difference and concern into specialised and technical discourses and practices”. Furthermore, projects (or purposes) can shift their focal points towards and thus inscribe “increasingly resistant materialities”. Facts are not achieved as stabilised, reified, or externalised linguistic meanings, but may also involve transposition into more durable semiotics, such as printed matter, technologised kinds of representation such as architectural design, and even the organisation of our spatial environment. Iedema claims that fact-construction is a major feature of processes taking place in formal organisations, and that in these contexts, “unstable agreements reached in and through embodied talk are conventionally resemiotised into alternative and less negotiable semioses such as written summaries, courses of action or more durable materialities” (ibid: 25). As a result of their resemiotisation:



...particular understandings and agreements attain organisational status, explicitness and relevance. As they mobilise not just embodied resources but also resources from the material, exo-somatic environment they may attain a naturalness and inconspicuousness. It is through resemiotisation then that organisationally relevant meanings are relegated from the volatile sphere of embodied semiosis, into the naturalising contexts of spatio-material semiosis (ibid:25).

Blommaert (2005) addresses related themes in his exploration of procedures undertaken by Belgian authorities with regard to the asylum seekers, as explained in previous chapters. He explains that:

...the asylum application is not constructed in one act of communication; it is constructed through a sequence of re-entextualisations, involving far-reaching reinterpretations of the story, summarising and rewording practices, and the reframing of the story in a legal and procedural framework containing criteria for 'truth' and 'plausibility'. This sequence is fixed: the text trajectory is a uniform administrative procedure. The procedurally consequent context ....involves a series of individual events as well as the relations between these events: the fact that talk is translated, written, summarised, and put into a legal/procedural framework, in sum, that every step in the systematically and uniformly performed process involves not replication but far-reaching transformations of the original story (ibid:63).

Blommaert states that the text trajectory is "a uniform administrative procedure" (ibid:64) but that "every step in the procedure involves inequalities in resources", and that "inequalities in linguistic-communicative resources in the asylum procedure accrue as the story is processed along the text trajectory" (ibid:64). So, in my reading of Blommaert's example, ***there is an inverse relation between the development of so-called "facticity" (to use Latour's term) and the valuing of the linguistic resources of the asylum seeker; as the procedures become more durable and less negotiable, the linguistic resources of the applicant become more de-valued, and less negotiable.***

Kress's curious use of the term "heavier" (quoted above), together with Iedema's analysis of the transformation into more durable forms of semiosis, seem to suggest a kind of 'natural' developmental process, 'the way of the world'. In the recording activeness trajectory, however, there was no "uniform administrative

procedure” nor was there any kind of progression along the lines of growing “facticity”. Neither the criteria nor the means for the recording of activeness were clearly established nor were they agreed upon. I was told by members of the SO that these were to be worked out in practice. The rhetoric around this (coming primarily from the SO and FSO, rather than from HASSOC however) was that groups in HASSOC established such mechanisms themselves, and shared their experiences to learn from each other. The by-product of such communally established processes was supposed to be the growth and strengthening of grassroots democracy and “the community”. A rhetoric was transmitted directly to me by staff members of the SO and the FSO that new modes of communication and organisational technologies (mediational means in the terms used in this thesis) were not to be introduced by “outsiders”, Khayaletu members needed to discover or search for these themselves. If they did not work the first time, then it was up to “the community” to change them and make them work the next time.

In contrast with the joins that were naturalised in the crossings between the activity systems in MamaSolani’s trajectory, joins had not been established or naturalised in the case of this trajectory. I argue instead that each of the joins became reified. This could be seen in the levels of anxiety about the note; anxiety about whether the women would be allowed to work; whether Busi and Nomi’s names would be recorded; whether this would qualify as activeness. Such anxiety was widespread and reflected in frequent references to the recording process and its text-artifacts. Such ‘translations’ could not be guaranteed nor predicted, and mediation was not necessarily benign.

The data supplied in strips 5 and 6 shows that ***this increasing scale of durability breaks down, at the same time as it becomes ever less negotiable***. In each case the actions of those to whom the translations have been delegated

demonstrate an arbitrary use of power and disregard for procedures, which despite their fragility had at least been attempted. The trajectory had not played out according to expectations as they were set out, and this left Khayaletu members feeling angry, silenced, resentful and eager to make allegations about corruption.

This leads to questions about power, identity and symbolic violence, which are addressed in Chapter Eight. I will touch on some aspects in beginning an answer to my fourth problem, which, so far has not been addressed.

#### **Problem Four: Finding a warrant for claims about literacy, power and social structure**

I will now consider various dimensions of this recontextualisation process, as suggested by Bauman and Briggs (1990:77), Linell (1998) and Blommaert (2001c). I will trace what Blommaert calls “differential access to contextual spaces”, and that this depends on “a degree of expertise that is very exclusive and the object of tremendous inequality in society” (2001c:42).

With reference to the strips presented above, I have argued for Blommaert’s “contextual spaces” (these are similar with what Street and Kress [2006] have called “cultural spaces”) to be conceptualised as strips, which imply space and participation frameworks embedded in activity systems. Busi and Nomi did not have access to strips 1 and 2, involving Nomhle’s entextualisation processes. Nomhle did not have access to strip 3, which involved the MC’s entextualisation process. The MC did not have access to strip 4, which involved HASSOC’s entextualisation process. By then, the delegation had gone so far that even though everyone had access to strip 5, they were completely silenced, and this eventually resulted in strip 6, which was a reaction to what appeared to be the arbitrary

exercise of power in strip 5. The difficult processes observed in strip 6 laid the basis for a range of further consequences.

Blommaert argues that access to contexts of re-entextualisation “depends on resources or technologies of contextualisation”. The elderly women delegated the recording of the names of those for whom they were substituting, to Busi and Nomi who wrote them down. They then delegated the task of converting the names into the list to Nomhle, who delegated the comparison into a table to MamaToleni and MamaKhanyisa, and these two eventually delegated the authority for the final decision to the HASSOC officials.

Each recontextualisation in each strip marked a delegation of control up a hierarchy of power, from the two elderly women, to Nomhle, to MamaToleni and MamaKhanyisa, to the HASSOC officials. Although, as mentioned in relation to strip 1, there was considerable verbal participation around each entextualisation process; however, in the actual interactions at each point, responsibility for the written recording and its interpretation was delegated to a person further up the hierarchy of power. Participation in this process of delegation was highly constrained. The results of this were seen in strip 5, when the recording process was disregarded and people were left feeling angry and powerless.

Linell (1998:147) suggests that professionals involved with recontextualisation play important gate-keeping roles and can “select, endorse and re-perspectivise”.

Although there was a rumble of anger throughout the final meeting, HASSOC officials were not overtly questioned on their decision. The *yho!* exclamations signalled people’s shock. There was no explanation of what their statement about “bad activeness” meant or how they arrived at that decision. I, myself, was deeply suspicious of that decision, as I had been looking for the officials prior to the meeting and was told that they were coming straight from a funeral. I wondered if

there had not been time to make a considered decision and the reasons given were just an excuse. The painstaking transactions around recording activeness, the paying of others to “stand in” and the tensions around the processes seemed to be swept away in that one statement.

## **Conclusion**

A comparison between Blommaert’s asylum-seekers’ text trajectory and the recording activeness trajectory revealed that there are differing and inverse relations between durability and negotiability in these two different contexts: Belgium and South Africa. In Belgium, the meanings implied in the text trajectory became more durable (i.e. the asylum seekers’ fate became sealed), but at the same time the valuing of their linguistic resources became less negotiable (there was devaluing, recasting, omissions and so on).

Iedema’s example of the hospital building showed that the meaning making trajectory led to more durable forms of semiosis, while at the same time these were, in his view, less negotiable. In Mehan’s research, discussed in Chapter Two, the trajectory involving the identification of special needs in a particular child, led to more durable meanings in that the child was classified as learning disabled. While this was happening, the non-professional linguistic resources of the mother, for example, became less negotiable, i.e. her experiences and insights expressed verbally were recast, subject to omissions and so on.

In the recording activeness trajectory, the first few strips showed it becoming less durable, rather than more; but at the same time, less negotiable. This resulted in the final allocation process which was a reaction to the earlier lack of achievement of durability, and which almost jeopardised the development. This process, although leading to durable forms of expression eventually (in that houses were

built on the plots that were allocated) was completely un-standardised (not “uniform”), fluid, flexible from one perspective, if not negotiable – the numbers were not sequential on the plan, some had already been perhaps mysteriously allocated, the numbers got washed off people's arms, people exchanged plots. However, I would argue that the lack of a scale of durability in the earlier strips are what led to the later risks being taken.

What do these comparisons tell us about power and the flow of meaning-making? I will argue that they tell us a great deal, but leave that to the final chapter.

In the meantime, what role has the language of description played in enabling invisibles to become visible in the recording activeness trajectory? In my earlier working with this data (before I came to the language of description) I did not have frameworks with which I could discover patterning, regularity or even themes, related to any field of study, in the overwhelmingly complex processes that were going on, at the site. Recording activeness was just one rather implicit process amongst hundreds of others. Subjecting the mass of data to the lens of meaning making enabled me to find some order, but this order is not an emic order, it is an order derived through a systematic application of heuristics to carefully selected, although always, very partial, data. These themes will be further explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter Seven. Trajectory Four: Accommodating an oversized house

*Activity systems can stretch out in space and time and multiply through social division of labour to become large, powerful and immensely varied, as their histories are played out dynamically through the use of a vast range of tools – often including inscriptions as discursive tools...and (re)constructed over a few seconds or many centuries... Activity systems...are dynamic systems constantly recreated through micro-level interactions... (They) do not operate independently but interact...by leading and motivating participants to move, individually and collectively, in different directions (Russell, 1997:512).*

*Multiplicity is about coexistences at a single moment. To make sense of multiplicity, we need to think about and write in topological ways, discovering methods for laying out a space, for laying out spaces, and for discovering paths to walk through these (Mol and Law, 2002:8).*

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the language of description developed in relation to the overall research questions and the three problem areas identified within the New Literacy Studies. I also touched on the fourth problem area. The language of description was derived from a close analysis of three trajectories in which events flowed more or less sequentially. I argued that this way of seeing constructed a method for studying the movement of meanings across contexts. In this chapter I further this argument, showing that the language of description was not only developed in order to 'describe' those particular sequences of events, but also to make sense of a highly complex field site in which a multiplicity of processes was occurring both sequentially and simultaneously. I will therefore be showing that the language of description can be applied as a heuristic not only to describe simple sequential processes but also to capture the complex relations between them. In order to capture this, it will be necessary to study points at which trajectories intersect.

I have also argued that the text-artifacts created (in entextualisation processes) can act as simple “joins” between the activity systems, but also as more complex boundary objects and even boundary infrastructures. I will focus in on these, but in this chapter I will be less concerned with print as a mediational means but with image, in the form of plans; less interested in simple written texts like lists and more in complex ones like standards (which may be represented as lists in written texts, like building regulations). This exploration is tentative, it aims to sketch out a terrain of study rather than provide definitive answers.

The key purpose of this chapter (to draw on the Mol and Law quote above) is to capture something of “multiplicity” being “coexistences at a single moment”; using the language of description to model a way of “laying out spaces”, the relative physical locations within which the activity systems come into being; of tracing the trajectories through these spaces as ways of “discovering paths to walk through these”.

The discussion is orientated (to a greater extent than in previous chapters) to the dynamics of the period of South African history under study. Bremner (1999:242), writing at the time that Khayaletu was struggling with its processes, claims:

Since 1994, divisions have not been blurred through the efficacies of principled, moral, urban administration or planning as might have been expected, but rather through new less normative logics – those of necessity, speculation and crime. A new city is emerging in which certain of apartheid’s social and spatial divisions are being deepened at the same time as other largely illicit ways of controlling, managing and using urban space challenge its rules. Necessity has driven the urban poor to reinvent the city in ways that challenge the utopianism of modern planning.

She argues further that:

Society is fractured into a myriad of exclusive, hostile, intersecting or conflated circles...a conglomeration of different and often (but not necessarily) hostile worlds, developing along different lines yet held together in structural interdependence by speculation, scarcity, crime and if not crime at least an underground economy. It remains to be seen which



views best describe the emerging landscape but the experience in other countries over the past decade suggests that we are more likely to move relentlessly towards a multiplicity of worlds in a divided city (ibid:243).

Bremner's language certainly draws on the "topological ways of thinking" suggested by Mol above. I hope that by using a rigorous language of description derived from data to make broader claims about societal processes, I can firstly throw more light on the specificities of the worlds she is talking about, and secondly show that whatever claims that are made need to be drawn systematically and methodically from research.

### **Plotting Trajectory Four**

The problems of Veliswa's oversized house took place at the same time as Trajectory Three: "Recording Activeness". Since Veliswa's house was one of the first twenty, building of these houses was going on at the same time that the new sites were being allocated for the next forty on the basis of "activeness". The first twenty were supposed to act as exemplars of the process, visible evidence of how it needed to work. But there were major problems with the first ten, they had ended up being much larger and more expensive than planned. Many were double storeys as planned by the architect, but people were rejecting the idea of double storeys. The dynamics around this were complex<sup>58</sup>. They were therefore not good examples of what the PHP was intended to achieve amongst the "poorest of the poor".

Veliswa's house was in the second ten houses to be built. The first ten were almost complete at this stage. The difficulties with the first ten meant that many changes were made to the building process, involving changes to the ordering

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<sup>58</sup> The architects had a brief to increase density on land that was relatively close to the city. The proposal was to make many of the houses double storeys. Members of Khayaletu initially accepted the idea of double storeys but later rejected it. This led to conflict as Hans had laid the site out with plot sizes that were suitable for double storeys not single storeys. When trajectory three took place with its rather chaotic final strip involving the allocation of sites, people simply started "cutting" their plots for single storey houses.

process; the recording of expenditure, employment and payment of builders and so on. These changes were difficult to observe if one was not on site 12 hours a day.

The method used to plot the trajectory is presented and reveals the intersection between the processes of “accommodating the oversized house” (Trajectory Four) and the aftermath of the “recording activeness” process (Trajectory Three). It shows how details collected during observations on site and recorded as field notes were “agglomerated” (Burawoy, 1998) into an understanding of process at a micro level, by tracing movement across time, space and participant framework. The first step in plotting this trajectory (trajectory four) involved tracking the field notes that referred to Veliswa’s house (at times this overlapped with the recording activeness trajectory):

Date	Events	Field-note number	Trajectory
04/01/99	Veliswa working on site, plots needing to be re-cut	1	Four
05/01/99	Plots needing to be cut all over again, Margaret makes the change	2	
14/01/99	Only one wall moving, people looking distressed	3	
20/01/99	Builders complaining, plan twisted	4	
15/02/99	Builders discussing tensions with Nonhutu (background)	5	
05/03/99	Extension can be seen	6	
17/04/99	Site allocation meeting (see Chapter Six)	A	Three
20/04/99	FSO member on site, predicts councillors will “freak out” (see footnote 53, Chapter Six)	B	
23/04/99	Everyone on site working (footnote 53, Chapter Six)	C	
26/04/99	Architects’ comments at their office	7	Three/Four
02/05/99	Architect on site, tells take down house	8	Four
03/05/99	Meeting with City Council (CCC) officials at Khayaletu	9	Three/Four
07/05/99	Architect’s assistant (Uta) meets with engineers, meets with site manager, re-draws Sub-division plan 1:500	10	Four
08/05/99	General meeting with Max and Hans	11	Three/Four
12/05/99	Uta meets with Planning Dept at CCC and internal roads at CCC, makes changes on sub-division plan	12	Three/Four
25/10/00	Interview with engineer, Deborah, explains how plan was changed	13	Four
20/10/00	Discussion with architects (background)	14	

*Figure 7.1: Selection of field notes used in constructing the trajectory*

The second step was to group the events in the field notes, but differentiate them according to participation framework and space or time. This started to illuminate the different activity systems at play.

<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Field note numbers</b>
Three months 4/01-05/03	Site of Veliswa's house	Building difficulties and extension. Margaret allows extension.	Veliswa, MamaToleni, Margaret, builders, architect	1,2,3,4,5,6
One meeting 26/04	Architect's office (suburb of Cape Town)	Discussion about vision, tensions on site and building regulations	Uta, two other architects	7
Ten minutes 02/05	Site of Veliswa's house	Architect tells Veliswa she must pull extension down	Veliswa, builders, architect	8
Two hours 03/05	Garage	Meeting with CCC members. Discussion about why plans are not getting passed	Council officials, Max, Hans, 2 Engineers, 4 HASSOC members, around 25 Khayaletu members	9
Two days 07/05	City Council offices (City Centre)	Discussion about road reserve and implications for plan	Hans, Uta, engineers, Council officials	10
Three hours 08/05	Garage (Khayaletu)	Khayaletu General meeting. Discussion about Veliswa's house and positioning of sites and slabs on land	Hans, Max, around 80 Khayaletu members incl. Veliswa	11
One day 12/05	Council office and architects' office (City Centre and suburb)	Uta picks up plan and redraws it	Council officials, Uta	12
Two hours 25/10	Engineers' office (City Centre)	Engineer explains how plan was re-configured to accommodate the extension	Deborah, CK	13
Two hours 20/10	Architects' office	General comments on "politics of Khayaletu"	Uta, Karl, Sheldon, Cathy	14

*Figure 7.2: Data compilation for constructing the trajectory*

In the third step the information was consolidated into strips showing how the meaning making process (accommodating an oversized house) took place. Two further steps were introduced into the overall argument for the language of description in this chapter. Firstly, the table below includes strips for which there was no direct data, but sufficient background information allowed for the strip to be

noted. So, for example, Strip 6 involved the process whereby the engineer finally worked out a way of accommodating the house. This was not directly observed by me, but was confirmed in a later interview that I conducted with her. Clearly there were numerous further events, discussions and incidents in this strip, which were not observable nor can they be inferred, but I have made a judgement about whether or not there is adequate information on which to construct the trajectory, on the basis of which an analysis of the recontextualisation of the meaning can take place. Secondly, I have drawn on a wider set of ethnographic field notes in this trajectory. In the previous ones I left out ethnographic data that was not strictly relevant to the purposes of the trajectory in order to throw the process into relief. This time, I try to show that once the trajectory has been described “thick descriptions” can enrich the study of particular strips.

Strip	Timescale	Events	Place	Participants
1.	Four months: January to April	Building the house, adding the extension. Tension around the fact that house does not comply with building regulations	On Veliswa's site	Veliswa, MamaToleni, builders, architects (Margaret and Hans)
2.	Two hours (in May)	Meeting with City Council Officials	Garage	Council officials, Max, Hans, 2 Engineers, 4 HASSOC members and around 25 Khayaletu members
3.	Three hours (May)	Meeting with Max, Hans and Khayaletu members	Garage	Hans, Max, around 80 Khayaletu members incl. Veliswa
4.	Two weeks	No change to Veliswa's house	Veliswa's house	(no data)
5.	One week (data not clear)	Architects in discussion with CCC about regulations	City Council offices	Hans, Uta, engineers, Council officials
6.	(no data)	Engineer works out adjustments to accommodate house		Engineer, architect
7.	(no data)	Veliswa told house is OK	(no data)	(no data)

*Figure 7.3: Sequential strips*

## Narrating Trajectory Four

### Strip 1: Building the oversized house: Snapshots

Snapshots of the data are presented in this section in order to draw attention to the mediational means rather than to the strictly sequential flow of the events, as in previous trajectories.

Seven.1.1.1	Description	Interpretation
1. 04/01/99 (Field notes: Ntt)	<p>There was a problem with two sites – Veliswa's and Mtana's. They were cut beyond the boundary. They needed to be done all over again. Mam'Ntongana's was having a problem. There was an argument with Malibongwe, Mam'Ntongana, MamaToleni and Faye.</p> <p>MamaNtongana: Oh I can't believe this.</p> <p>MamFaye: This plot is Mam'Ntongana's if the measurements exceeded the required what is the big deal as this is not someone else's plot?</p> <p>Malibongwe(builder): You don't understand the matter. This is her plot. The person cutting is responsible at the end of the day. <b>Here</b> is the layout (points to the plan he is holding) and we have to follow it.</p> <p>MamaToleni: The problem <b>here</b> is that there is not enough room for your yard (she is holding a measuring tape). This is over by 1.7 m.</p>	
	<p>MamaFaye: I don't understand because it was said one can exceed and overspend as long as you are prepared to pay the difference.</p>	<p>MamaFaye indicates she is not aware that if a person goes over the boundary they are extending into the road reserve (there is no mark on the ground to show the road needs to be built at that point). If the road reserve needs to shift this will have implications for the sites on the opposite side of the road. Malibongwe does not explain that to her, but couches his argument in the responsibility of the site owner, and delegates the authority for decisions to the layout plan – "Here is the layout". He is fully familiar with the plan, whereas most others (apart from MamaToleni) do not understand the plan. MamaToleni doesn't help him with reference to the plan, she tries to help MamaFaye to understand by pointing "here" to show that the house will then be built close to the boundary and that there will not be a yard.</p>
	<p>Malibongwe (builder): Listen to me, I am the builder. You have to follow the plan. Anything else you do that is not in the plan you are in trouble. The owner of the house must come with such a plan for extension and I will agree with you, and you don't only consider your plan but the layout as well.</p> <p>All four had to be done over again.</p>	<p>MamaFaye, in not understanding the stringent constraints of working to the overall layout plan, invokes the earlier HASSOC discourses and practices. These are now in question. The fact that an extension is being planned is already a deviation from the original plan<sup>59</sup>. Malibongwe invokes positional authority "I am the builder", you have to come to me and "I" will agree with you. But he does then explain that the house and the layout need to be considered together. This time he and MamaToleni succeed and the measuring and "cutting" are done over again.</p>

<sup>59</sup> MamaFaye refers to the original vision for Khayaletu – that people would build to an optimum 40sqm plan but that if they had the resources they would be able to build bigger than that, either a 54 sqm house or a 60 or a 72 and so on. This vision was founded on the idea that the labour of members contributed enough that people could build bigger houses than those being built all over South Africa by private "developers" – the "matchbox" or "toilet" houses. Matchbox houses were also built with subsidies, the difference was that profit went into the pockets of the developers at the expense of the size of the house.

Antecedent events to strip 1 included the fact that the architect had supplied an overall layout plan, as well as a plan for Veliswa's house (which was to be built as a semi-detached house). The layout had not yet been 'passed' by the City Council and there was an awareness that building inspectors would need to check that what had happened on site corresponded with the layout.

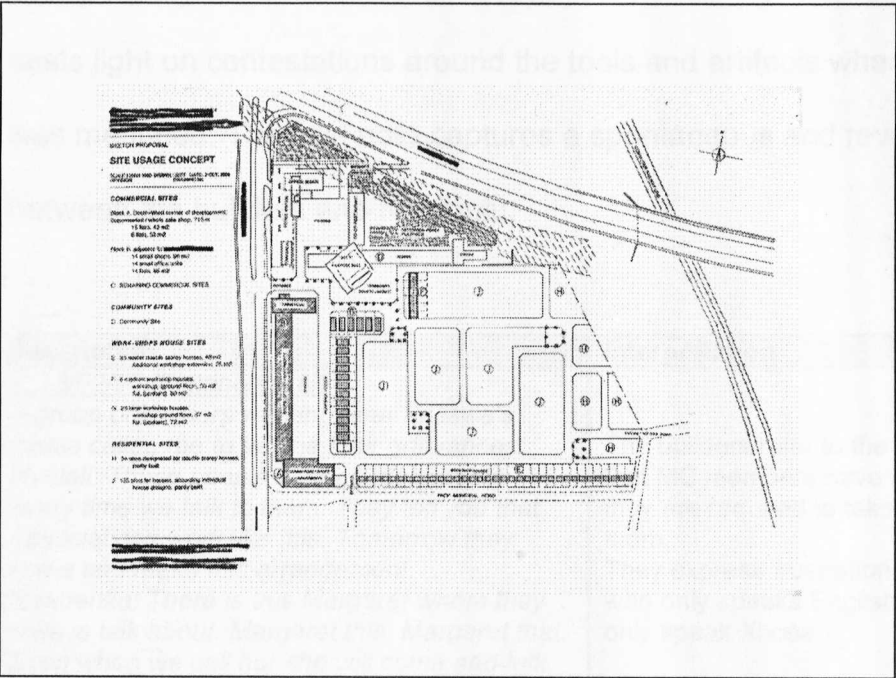
This snapshot provides data that has little to do with the reading and writing of print. Different mediational means are central and clearly in evidence. I argue that the moment the plan is referred to (and the recognition that what is on the land does not follow the plan) is a node. The event shows how the visual interpretation of the layout plan takes place within a participant framework that is complex and hybridised<sup>60</sup>. Also evident within the event are forms of articulation involving the making of inscriptions on the land (or lack of them). The lines of gut strung between the pegs marking the sites were organised by MamaToleni, the builders and Khayaletu members together, without a hierarchical division of labour, but highly contested.

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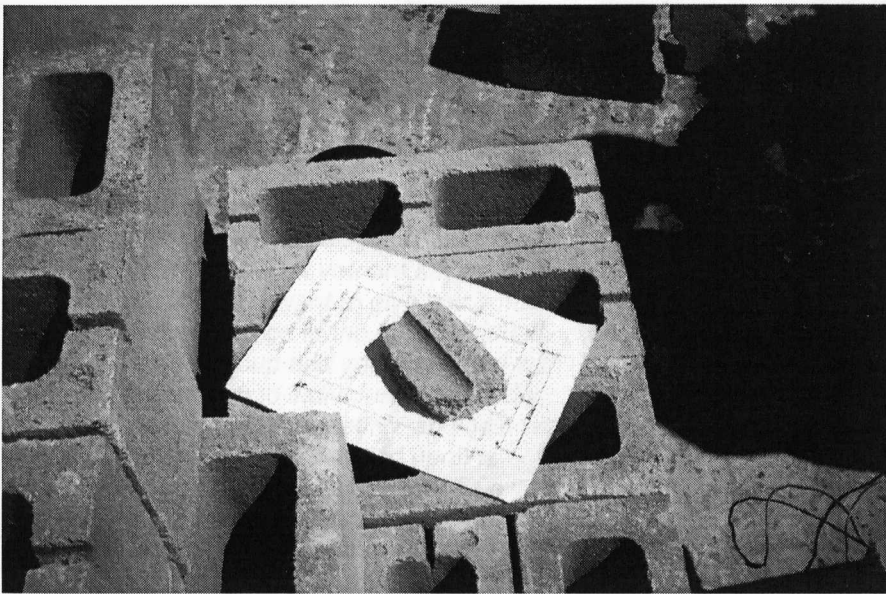
<sup>60</sup> In most of the 'developed' world, building tasks like these are undertaken by surveyors and builders who are delegated authority to make decisions, in a specialised division of labour. In the shanty-towns, few building projects are required to follow highly regulated and specialised processes, like complying with building regulations. The efforts of HASSOC and the SO represent a brave attempt to develop approaches to span these two worlds.



*Figure 7.4: Mediational means – the layout plan, pegs and gut for “cutting” plots*



*Figure 7.5: A larger scale copy of the overall layout plan (no copy of the plan referred to above was available)*



*Figure 7.6: A smaller scale copy of a house plan*

The plan acts as a powerful “join” between the different worlds referred to in footnote 3. However, it will be seen that this join itself was rendered negotiable in the events that followed.

I will now discuss field note 5, although it is not strictly relevant to this trajectory, it casts light on contestations around the tools and artifacts whereby this trajectory was mediated. The field note captures a spontaneous and revealing discussion between the builders and Nonthutu.

Description	Interpretation
<p><u>5. 15/02/99 (Fieldnotes: Ntt)</u>  A group of builders working near Veliswa’s house called me to tell me their grievances: Mveleli: These people change statements every time we talk to them. They tell you that Associations work like this. Tomorrow they come and make this arrangement. Makhenke: There is this Margaret whom they always talk about. Margaret this, Margaret that. Even when we call her she will come and talk language you can’t understand (“vete-vete-vete”). Liberty: It’s no use discussing them because they always change statements. What I want to tell you is this: What we are thinking of doing is that we are going to Cape Town and the inspector will come here and assess what we are doing here. I am telling you that this won’t</p>	<p>The builders refer to the MC, they feel that MC members have no expertise yet they are required to take instructions from them.  They express frustration with Margaret, who only speaks English. The builders only speak Xhosa.</p> <p>Liberty considers a direct act of protest - going directly to the City Council (bypassing the MC, Hans, the SO and HASSOC).</p>



*be nice because I am sure all the subsidies remaining will have to be given to us<sup>61</sup>. Builders don't work like this, never. We come here using public transport, we eat and we have families to support. We expect to be treated like people.*

*Makhenke: What they don't have is respect, they talk to us as if we are dogs.*

*Nonthutu: I can hear what you are saying and I sympathise with you. I want to give you some advice. One does not go to the MC individually but go there as a group and you must deal with the group too, not go to individuals. Secondly, they keep minutes of the meeting, so you have to make sure that what is decided upon is written down so that you can use that as a reference in your arguments.*

*Mveleli: We came here because we don't want that level of sophisticated arrangements. You do those things when you deal with other races but with your own people you must have trust only. We need to think about that other person's feelings.*

*Moses: On what you are talking about...who will write? Because it seems as if we do not all see flies (asiziboni sonke impukane)<sup>62</sup>. And even these women do not write. Why don't you do that for us?*

*Nonthutu: No, I won't do that but I can help you so that you can do it yourselves.*

*Liberty: It's been a long time... we didn't talk about education. We are too old to learn, we want money.*

*Nonthutu: If you don't take my advice you will complain everyday.*

*Moses: You must warn these people that we are going to take action....*

Makhenke's statement echoes aspects of Nomthamsanqa's story. She wrote about how the three amigos had "beaten" and belittled her.

Nonthutu expresses the problem discussed in Chapter Six: there seemed to be "too much participation and not enough reification", the fluidity of the building process and the lack of codification of procedures.

Mveleli retorts that at Khayaletu, things need to be different, alluding to the ways in which people have alternative mediating repertoires, like trust as opposed to written procedures.

Moses expresses ambivalence, maybe the tools (of literacy) could be helpful but there are the problems of access.

Themes in the research conducted for the Social Uses of Literacy project (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996), and in the summary articles (Kell, 1997; Prinsloo and Kell, 1999) echo in the words of the builders.



<sup>61</sup> The builder claims that building is not following regulations, implying that when the building inspectors see what is being done on site they will call a halt. This means that the subsidy money will no longer be available.

<sup>62</sup> "Seeing flies" is apparently a reference to the way the letters of the alphabet look on the page. The idiom means we cannot read and write.

Figure 7.7: One of the builders working on the foundations for a house whose site had recently been cut.

A while later, tension started to emerge around Veliswa's house, and Hans instructed MamaToleni to tell her to take part of it down.

18/04/99 Field notes (Nonthutu)

*We passed Veliswa's house who is supposed to destroy part of her house because it seems as if it comes to near to the boundary – in fact it exceeded. Hans said in the garage before we moved over to the site apparently it would be only labour that would be wasted but the material would be used again.*

18/04/99 Field notes (Cathy)

*Hans comes into the meeting in the garage, shows the plan, everyone gathers round. Khaya is employed as a technical assistant by the SO. Hans points to Veliswa's house:*

*Hans: I've said you must pull down this corner.*

*MamaToleni: (in Xhosa) I've told the owner about that, but she is very frustrated.*

*Khaya: Maybe we can get it passed like this with the 1.2m difference?*

*MamaToleni: How wide is the site across here?*

*Uta: (doesn't answer MamaToleni) We'll have to look at the other plan because I've been making adjustments. ...*

*Hans: the first decision is this corner must be pulled down*

*All: Haai (No).*

*MamaToleni: I've told her but I'm not sure if...*

*Hans: Uta can help her work it out.*

*Hans: Maybe we can adapt this corner so we don't have to pull it all down.*

*MamaToleni: But isn't that going to make a crack?*

*Hans: If it's done professionally, it's OK.*

During Strip One, the events of the "recording activeness" trajectory discussed in the previous chapter took place. The site allocation for the next forty houses happened and people immediately started "cutting" plots and digging foundations. In the previous chapter (at this point in the trajectory) I drew attention to the fact that there was contestation between KH1 and KH 2 and this was expressed in struggles over who had access to the layout plans. KH1 had managed to have a prior meeting to discuss the layout plan, but KH2 members had not managed to do so and had not been able to get access to the plan. There was suspicion amongst Khaya lethu members that this was deliberate so that KH1 members could have first choice of sites.

I now shift away spatially, across the twenty kilometres to the architects' offices in the suburb of Westhaven which I visited during the period of time that strip 1 took

place. This is not included as a strip since the data does not provide evidence of events related to the trajectory under study, but the field note does provide some important background information.

The offices were a quiet haven, brimming with plans, stacks of papers, beautiful, highly worked graphic texts covering the walls and the abstracted three-dimensional representations of their scale models. Representations of luxury holiday houses jostled for space on the walls and tables with the now familiar plans and models of the houses for the poorest of the poor.

The field notes were as follows:

Description	Interpretation
<p><i>7. 26/04/99 Field notes (Cathy) At Hans's office.</i></p> <p><i>Uta (the architect's assistant) launched into a long discussion. The overwhelming problem in her mind was that "they are building a slum - the plots are not big enough for the single storey houses, they are 7x20 and that will not leave enough space down the side of the houses. In some cases the gap between the houses is only 700mm wide".</i></p> <p><i>She showed me plans of house types and many that had been rejected. The only one that people seemed to be using was one developed by Margaret, but "there are actually three different double storey ones that have been built" and that can be looked at".</i></p> <p><i>She was amazed that people are already cutting plots and foundations for single story houses on plots that were meant for double storeys. She felt overwhelmed that that was happening and couldn't work out how the decisions had been made.</i></p> <p><i>Karl then repeated that "Hans is going to have a fit because they are building a slum", and they had "tried so hard to do something different, the vision had been quite different" and they had workshopped it so many times. Uta added "it's very frustrating as you go over things over and over again and still people just go ahead and do something quite different".</i></p>	<p>Khayaletu had been viewed by the architects as presenting the possibility for a "model" development. One of the key premises for a "model development" (from the architects' perspective) was that it would accommodate a maximum possible number of families but the density would be higher in that houses would be double storied, and some would be semi-detached. So early on in the process of building, the shift away from the double storeys, (given the by now very visible problems with the first ten) was alarming. The plot width of seven meters was for double storeys. If a single storey house was built on a 7m wide plot there would be no light into the rooms down the side and the Council might not pass the plan.</p> <p>Khayaletu members were moving ahead according to a contradictory vision - the "dream house" that the SO had introduced from the beginning. Khayaletu members had always been ambivalent about double storeys.</p>

This field note provides evidence of another trajectory, that of the architect, who saw himself as leading a “model development”. Veliswa’s house was just one amongst many problems confounding this vision.

### Strip 2: The oversized house threatens the passing of the plans

In strip two different activity systems were involved. For the first time, the City Council was invited out to the site, at the request of the SO and the architect. This meeting, making up Strip Two, was a baffling occasion. Four months earlier the group of builders had themselves indicated that they wanted to report what was happening to the Council. The builders, however, were not present at the meeting in this strip, nor were many members of Khayaletu (perhaps 15 or so). Around eight members of the City Council were there; Max and a new fieldworker who had replaced Margaret (SO); Hans, Karl and Uta (architects); about three engineers who worked with Deborah; about four HASSOC officials, myself and Nonthutu. There was great anxiety prior to the meeting. Uta passed me saying that they had prepared some “beautiful charts”. The impressive architects’ charts were stuck on the wall of the garage. My field notes state: “Karl is in the Chair, and is standing in front of the charts which look very impressive, reminding me of my architecture days, of the paperwork side of things. They speak a totally different language.”

A few extracts from the field notes for this meeting are presented:

#### **Strip 2: Description**

9. Karl: *This meeting has been called for two reasons – to bring those who are not here on a day to day basis to the site to get to know each other, and to show you that this is not a development like any normal development with a series of professionals who work in offices, producing plans and so on. Here we are dealing with the PHP which is strongly advocated by the National Housing Board...*

.....

*People are using their own sweat equity, together with HASSOC. We are here to iron out the last few problems before we get approval.*

*Hans: Good morning everyone, Karl will distribute a paper to you all (see extracts below) there has been a lot of paper and a lot of talk about many little issues which are actually quite big. I believe that there are three points from the City's side. Firstly, the issue of the residential roads, these (gestures to plan) are 6m wide, we hear that they should be 8m. Secondly the location of the taxi rank and thirdly the location of the playing fields. ... The reason that we are here, and not in the Council or planning offices is so that we can bridge*

the gap and so that the community can understand the arguments. The engineers are here and us from (SO) are here to move in between. The reason we are here is to build as many houses as possible and also of course to build a quality environment...

...If we run through fast enough there might be enough time to go on site. Council has requested plans of existing houses built to date. I propose that a good exercise for us planners and you officials as is to see things at one to one, to move from theory to the ground. Karl is distributing this paper. I'd like to mention two or three principles from the community and the consultants' side. I have worked with planning for about the past 25 years and come to the conclusion that we need to find a way back to the communities who are the beneficiaries of our planning, we need to adapt in the process of implementation (unclear, people are now all looking at the document that was distributed). Unfortunately too often for the common people who are affected by planning regulations, those who are regulated by those regulations perceive them as a hassle and a hindrance to their goals. So today we have the goal of meeting to bridge this gap of misunderstanding. (Goes through previous history of development, working through each of the three points in detail).

.....  
Karl: we really need approval so that we can go ahead with the bulk services. If the authors of the problems are here let's thrash them out.

FSO: The project has been approved by the Provincial Housing Board, but until the technical issues are sorted out we can't get any funding released.

CCC: I understand that there are a lot of planning principles here and many have merit. Some technical issues may have been overlooked....(asks about "public open space and access). On the administrative follow-up, it's not clear if this has been considered. I see that there is very much housing and this is not offset with job creation. These issues are political and may be taken away from the Council. Because this is a residential dormitory, the whole area is developed for residential use, but you lose on the industrial opportunities. If you haven't dealt with ...(unclear) you will be tied into a residential zoning scheme where normal building lines will apply. ...

Karl to translator: Shall I put that in a nutshell?

Translator: Yes!

Karl: The concern is that the area is more residential than originally planned, if we go for residential then restrictions apply that we are contravening.

(Short interchange in Xhosa)

Hans: From a theoretical point of view I agree with you one hundred percent and support you, on the one hand. On the other we have tried to deal with the reality, which is quite different. I can spend two or three years planning and then the whole field is filled with squatters, then we don't need to apply for anything.

.....  
CCC: Something else that's possibly contentious. The number of units has now been decided, this may prejudice other developments.

Karl: From a professional perspective we understand that, but this is two-way process, the community must also understand that. It puts us in the middle.

Translator: Sorry, can you repeat that?

Karl: Mr (CCC) is saying that the buildings have been done without permission may prejudice other applications.

Mr (CCC): These decisions are taken by politicians, not by officials; they might feel that they have been forced into a corner.

Karl: MamaToleni would like to ask a last question.

(short discussion in Xhosa)

MamaToleni: I want to say, yes, we do understand, but that is a pressure from the community. It's along time that people have been staying in backyard places, paying out money, having a bad life. That is their feeling, they are suffering, not the Council or the politicians.

Karl: That's a very important point, something we should consider – while we are debating road widths they are living in backyards, and there is a lot of frustration on their side.

.....  
The meeting ends with an agreement that Hans will meet separately with the CCC.

The document that Hans circulated presents:

- all names of those to be present at the meeting,
- planning principles
- the project history

- the planning response (on three issues – residential street width; taxi rank and playfield).

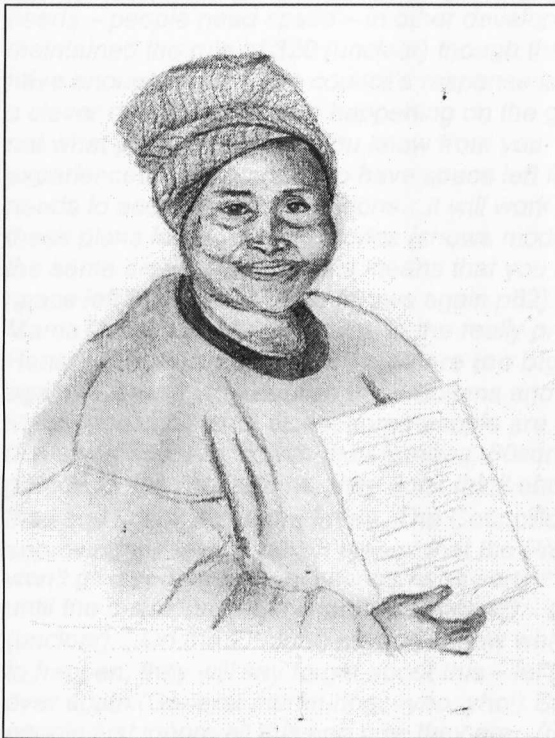
The principles are articulated as:

“It is understood that planning regulations are there to secure and support a community and to balance public and individual interests.  
In order to function, a community needs to develop a certain amount of self-identification and responsibility for its environment and common interests.  
If regulations, originally put into place in the interests of all, appear to become a hindrance to or destructive to the process of community building, people either get frustrated or begin to ignore such regulations.”

As the participants left the room, there was a cloudburst. Max turned to Karl, expressing relief that the Council members would not walk over to the site in these conditions and therefore would not see all the irregularities that had been and were being built.

I asked Uta if the charts could stay up on the wall so that members of Khayaletu could spend time becoming more familiar with them. Nonthutu and I had noted how difficult it was for people to gain access to the plans and how constrained their understandings of the layout were. Uta said I would have to ask Hans, when I asked Hans his reply was “No, I don’t want them to get messed up, in my experience people never look at these things”.

A few days after this, Nonthutu and I translated the document that Hans had circulated at the meeting into Xhosa and photocopied about 30 copies, including some plans. We circulated those to members of Khayaletu, and we found that numerous members of Khayaletu came up to us afterwards asking for copies for themselves. There was little comment around the document itself, it was as if possession of the document was important in itself.



*Figure 7.8: A Khayaletu member at the meeting spontaneously holding up the English document*

A few days later, another meeting (up to 80 people) was held bringing together the Khayaletu membership, Hans and Max.

<b>Strip 3: Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<p><u>11. Field notes (Combined Nonthutu and Cathy)</u></p> <p><i>Hans: Let me start with the most pressing problem, which makes it difficult for the council to approve the layout. The councillors are told that the building process was started before approval, so the first problem is this house, (pointing) it's there, everyone knows whose house this is. (Points to the layout plan that has been stuck on the wall, then draws small sketch on the blackboard, see Figure 7.10 below)</i></p> <p><i>Because of that (points to the verandah) this building needs to be demolished at this point, that is at the benefit of all, it might be hurting to the owner, but the material can be used later for future extensions.</i></p> <p><i>Another problem is the plots, or how the houses are put on the plots. We are trying to accommodate 230 families. KH1 and KH2 wanted 400 families, the compromise was made to 230 and we are trying to fit this.</i></p> <p><i>You can't extend on the outside envelope of the land you have. But you have to design narrow roads and save 2m that may be used for houses... We don't want to fight with the engineers but we want to accommodate people's</i></p>	<p>The problem with Veliswa's house is pointed out. The layout plan has not been accepted by the Council. We know that the Councillors had not yet viewed developments on the site (the cloudburst helped in this regard). Hans will have to get the buildings on site to correspond with the plan before the Council can view the site, if the plan is to be approved.</p> <p>He makes a connection with the events of Trajectory Three, explaining the difficulties of fitting 230 families let alone the original 400 proposed. These constraints are exacerbated by the fact that people have rejected the double stories, have moved quickly to cut their plots.</p>

<sup>63</sup> "Yet celebrating complexity is not what we are out to do here" (Law and Mol, 2002:5). I tend to agree with Mol and Law. Max's choice of words here is very interesting, they imply that there's a kind of magic, it just happens. The data here shows that the way in which mediating means are drawn on or not drawn on can exacerbate contradictions and divisions. At the same time the SO was experiencing anxiety about the bureaucratisation taking place at grassroots level and power struggles that were holding back development.



needs – people need space – in other developments we maintained the rule of 320 (unclear) though they didn't have enough land.... The council's response is "you have a clever design but what is happening on the ground is not what you are saying". You know from your experiences that you need to have space left for future needs to accommodate additions...It will work best on these plans for the double stories (shows model) they are the same area inside, but this means that you have more space left for you to extend (draws again p62).

MamaToleni: I want us to come to the really problem -

Hans: - **the problem is that some are too big** (draws again). Can we individualise the problems and look at –  
Max: - you can't work alone, some people are working on their own, some work with their families, 80sqm is too greedy for the programme, they don't think about others, they don't think about the future. The Councillors are not approving the layout, which means that the Provincial won't give you money, this needs to be sorted out and until the development is approved (unclear)... get lost (unclear).... On the 2<sup>nd</sup> June we don't know what is going to happen, they will say forget about this – let's start all over again. (General murmuring....yho, yho!) Some people just ignore all this and now they are...(unclear). So just stick with 40sqm, and you can do more foundations, make this sacrifice for the approval of the layout and the bulk services. A house is like a person, it never stops growing, like a baby, you can start with something small and then expand, all should get a place according to what Khayaletu has already designed. OK? That's an important step. (loud whisperings) If you insist on an 80sqm slab you are disregarding the plan, you stop the chances for approval and you jeopardise the subsidy before the election.

.....

Quanta: Whose problem is this? Why they didn't take the layout first before we were to build? You are supposed to draw the plans and take them to the City Council. Then the Council gives an answer –

MamaToleni: (unclear)

Quanta: I give you a question I just want an answer.

Whose responsibility is this?

MamaToleni: Let me answer –

Members: - No, let's hear from them –

MamaToleni: It was just the strategy to make councillors ... I tried to explain, but no-one (unclear)... because the plan was already given ....

.....

Hans: Whose responsibility? Khayaletu, you as a whole group are responsible. It is your responsibility to work out a solution for the whole group not just for the wishes of one member. It was not to trick the council but the best solution for Khayaletu as part of HASSOC. Your homes set an example for new groups saving and looking for land. If you do something different from the average township then you give inspiration but if everything is all crowded and deurmekaar (mixed up), then the exercise has failed, it doesn't help other groups.

.....

Nomonde: I have a new question. Do we all have to have 40sqm?

(much loud shouting – RDP houses, 40, mors! (that's rubbish)

Max: Let me respond. We are trying to find a way to get

The threats of losing the subsidies and of a land invasion, were ever-present as long as the land stood empty. There had been a debate about whether it would be better to simply cast the foundations slabs and then build shacks on top of them in order to slow down the pace of development and stave off a possible land invasion. Khayaletu members had been in uproar about this idea.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> June marked the day of a local government election. The ANC could have been replaced as the majority in local government. The new structures may have viewed the subsidy applications and the PHP in a less sympathetic light.

Hans and Max stress that people need to "work out problems for themselves".

Quanta knows the architects are being paid a slice off the top of the subsidy money belonging (in theory) to each individual member. He sees the relation as a client one, the SO and the architects are being paid to do a job.

House size indexed conflicting ideologies and wider processes of social stratification in South Africa. However, within Khayaletu, there was a struggle over social stratification as well. All those who were building above 40sqm were seen as having access to more personal resources, able to differentiate



the plans approved so that the development can continue. We need 4 steps. One, people must finish the 40sqm slabs. People who have problems with their plots, they must meet with the MC and Hans to sort out the problems, set up the MC to work with Hans so that you will be happy with the solution. A sub-committee must have a responsibility for approving every single plan. Hans must look at each plan before building, check the light, the layout and so on. When it is accepted then FSO can give the loan. You see, it's all-important to understand in terms of this, you are the owners, you have to have a say, but you must negotiate. I

.....

(Max goes to write on the board...)

Veliswa: I've got a problem, I am a bit confused because that is my yard (pointing to plan on wall) when I decided to add on in the small space that I had left, whereby Margaret encouraged me not to add on that way, on the sides, she told me I must do it in front, she had 5m and she took that space, I am confused because Margaret is the one.

Hans: I wasn't there when Margaret made this suggestion and I'm sure she made the right suggestion, but the issue of crossing the boundary is not something she could recommend – I don't know if that was a problem of arithmetic or geometry, that someone took a wrong dimension, or a problem of misunderstanding, I can't go back – but the result now is problematic. It's difficult to go back to find the reason - (Max is writing up the steps on the board, people are watching him writing while they listen to Hans talking) but what's best must happen from here. Those families that are not yet building must look at this. Max is writing down everything to be considered (gestures to Max writing on the board) and understand that, so as not to waste materials and building, making more mistakes. The houses that were built in October and November, they're all bigger than 60sqm, don't think we must take them as examples, think they got away with it, so we must, if something is a problem then we can repeat it.

MamaFaye: - Now they are saying -

Max: - (unclear)

MamaFaye: - the slab we made we are not going to demolish but to meet with the MC first? That can make you corrupt. Secondly, on these double stories, there are people here with no activeness proven, now they have been allocated flats to be built. Those who came later, they want the double stories must be for active people only, maybe those houses can change others' minds. So this is going to cause a problem – this is not HASSOC.

Max: The important thing we are discussing is with the work we're doing now, nobody knows exactly how it happens, we know people drive it, create their own houses and their own lives. Now people are moving, you start to address the problems because you are active. Last week you fell pregnant, in nine months time you will see the result<sup>63</sup>.

.....

Hans: You're misunderstanding something. 40sqm as a starter house is not to trick the Council – it's also the policy of HASSOC to help those who can't afford, to give an equal and fair start to all. That's why a 40sqm starter house is suggested. To extend my answer – I'm not surprised you like a bigger house, that's not wrong, but to

themselves. Veliswa's house indexed this – the extension and was highly visible as a form of differentiation, in an otherwise uniform environment.

The node referred to in Strip One now comes to light. Veliswa initially could not visualise how her extension compromised the size of the road reserve and therefore the block on the opposite side of the road.

This is the only time I saw Max producing a written text. It was written up on the spur of the moment and informally. No one but Nonthutu and I took them down (see below). However, the entextualisation process does represent an attempt to firm up the decision making process, while at the same time respect the discussions that were being held.

MamaFaye is suggesting that members may bribe the MC to accept the slab.

Because the double storeys had been rejected, Hans had made a plea for a block of double storeys to go ahead and be allocated to people who were prepared to accept them, even though they had "no activeness proven". By saying this is "not HASSOC", she is saying that policy is not being followed.

start with 40sqm that's the plan. Together we design 40sqm so that you can easily extend, plan for 80sqm. Because of issues of the Council but also because of the subsidy. You don't want a big burden at the beginning, get the development started, you don't want 20 families with 80sqm, you need 200, it's not only your house, it's self-help.

.....

Nandi: Hans is saying that maybe there are people without money, and that 80sqm is going to make a problem for FSO, and what we know is that we can build equally according to what we have.(unclear).. Here we have got people who have got money to do what they want, others not. How can you force everyone?

Max: Look at who is doing 80sqm. Check with Hans, those who are building 80sqm can't even put a roof on, can't put the infrastructure in, you're building 236 houses, not one, you're building 236 houses as starters. When you're finished, you say the 40sqm are finished. Then negotiate with Hans. He'll say here's how to do it so you get enough light and so on, but start with 40 or 36. You have to remember that normally what happens is first the infrastructure then the house. Otherwise you build the house where the infrastructure should be. You can't build the houses then come and shout at us because the infrastructure costs that much.

Max: Before we go, I'm going to take you through the points, all these issues are about point 3 – the slabs and the foundations that have problems. Each slab must be inspected by Hans, the MC and the family together (loud murmuring – yes!) then you can sort out the problems on the ground.

Hans: It makes sense to group families. One group meets together, it affects the neighbours how you position the house, we'll have 3 or 4 sessions organised early next week with MamaToleni.

....

MamaFaye: (stands up) I wanted to say that the slogan of HASSOC from Matshoba Rd was that we are sick and tired of toilets. If we start from 40sqm, 40 sqm is too small, it's one bedroom, what about -

Max: Is it?

MamaFaye: - what about my children and my husband? I am happy you are here and in Matshoba you were there, we said no more shacks - now we are going to make shacks. My house is 60sqm, I am not changing that. Matshoba Rd was my slogan!

Members: Translate what MamaFaye said!

Members: No, they heard!

Members: They can hear themselves.

Max: Then members must understand why they are not getting their subsidies. You are all in this together, what is really important is that people are looking for larger houses, nobody is saying they can't be larger. What we are saying is that you can't put your shoes on before your pants (laughter).

.....

Veliswa: I still have a question, I want them to come and show me what is this problem, don't I have a yard as I thought I had space in the front?

(unclear) – if you can take her and show her –

Hans: I suggest that all single storey houses starting with their foundations agree to meet so that the problems can be addressed. It'll take about 2 to 3 hours for each group.

Nandi refers back to the original vision of the "dream house" – that those who have additional resources can use them to build bigger.

MamaFaye stands up to bring more force to her words. She brings the meeting back to the founding HASSOC discourse, of opposition to the RDP houses. Matshoba was an area where HASSOC undertook a public struggle for land and houses.

Veliswa's question is not really addressed this time and the meeting moves on to other issues.

Here are the points that Max was writing (in English) on the board while Hans was talking.

1. 40sqm foundations checked (by committee & Hans) then poured.
2. 20 double storeys built on site boundary
3. Slabs/foundations over 40sqm committee and Hans work with families to resolve problem
4. All future plans approval after negotiation between families, committee and Hans. No building before approval.

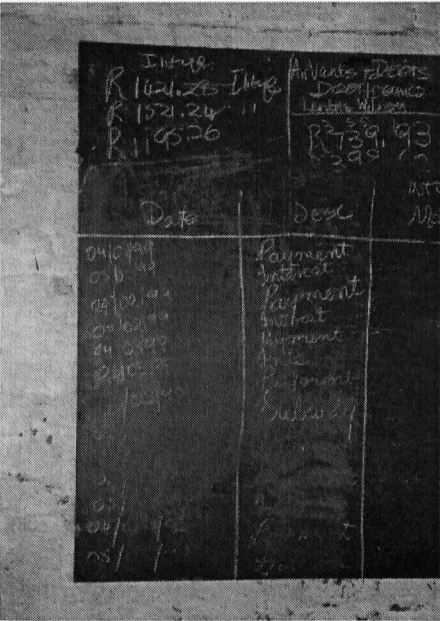


Figure 7.9: A photograph of the board on the wall in the garage showing calculations from an earlier meeting

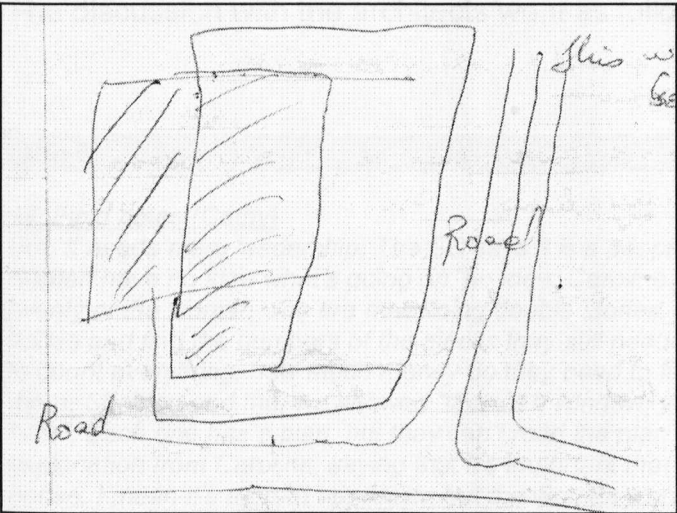


Figure 7.10: Nonthutu's field note of Hans's sketch on the blackboard, the shaded section shows the intrusion of Veliswa's extension into the road reserve.

### Stalemate

Over the next few weeks, these procedures were not followed. Nonthutu and I had been trying to work with people on the expenditure sheets and this had been very fraught. The three amigos had made it clear that they did not want our involvement and had simply written the same amounts on each person's sheet, while it was clear to people that everyone's expenditure was not the same. It was very difficult to open this up for discussion, and allegations were emerging that corruption around the expenditure was occurring.

Soon after this, a crisis meeting was called by the new SO fieldworker bringing together the Khayaletu MC, HASSOC officials, FSO and SO staff and the architects. Nonthutu and I were finding it increasingly difficult to operate on the site and my observations ceased. I did however collect data at a later stage relating to this trajectory in the form of firstly, another discussion between myself and the architects and secondly, an interview with the engineer, Deborah, which took place at the offices of her company in the centre of the city.

### Resolution

The discussion with the architects went as follows:

#### **Strip 5**

##### 14. Field notes (Cathy)

*Uta: It needs more leadership. The SO says it is a people's process, but most people, the women have no idea what's going on, no idea. Caroline (from SO) asked me to meet with twenty of the women who are now doing double stories. With each one I had to go to the house and find the numbers of the blocks they still needed and how many windows, we had to count everything, how much money do they need to finish. The women were standing there, Sheldon and me, we showed "there's a window, you will need 37 blocks to finish here". Each one has a plan, but they can't read the plan. And there was too much explanation from Caroline, saying that it's important that you are involved with your own house. I mean it's a great approach, but the women were just so thankful when I took the pen in my hand and said now we must write down, they were just overwhelmed.*

*Cathy: But maybe they actually couldn't write?*

*Uta: No they could! But they didn't know what was required.*

*Cathy: Yes, this is what I've noticed, people say, yes they can read and write but they don't know how to manage the expenditure sheets, so it's not a technical problem, it's about not having the knowledge or information that's needed.*

*Sheldon: People in the SO don't even understand, the education needs to start with them. There are many, many meetings, and decisions are made here and there, instead of everyone there and discuss together.*

.....

*Uta: Yes, people don't even like the double stories, maybe you can't blame them because they only see the ones there and the finishing is so terrible.*

*Sheldon: But there was no supervision, they're dangerous. It's because there's no accountability to the plans –*

*Uli and Karl: - mmmm, ja.*

*Sheldon: - or even to the building regulations, the staircases are dangerous.*

*Uta: Ooohh, those staircases, they make me...(shivers) –*

.....

*Cathy: - What has happened with the building inspectors?*

*Sheldon: It's terrible, they're freaking out. The SO says they're trying to work it out.*

*Uta (to Cathy): Remember the first time they came?*

*Sheldon: Well, we find them actually quite sympathetic –*

*Uta: - but the SO didn't, they kept saying they are blocking the development, they should be more lenient –*

*Karl: - but they wanted to help.*

Finally the discussion with the engineer takes an interesting turn and the resolution to the problem of Veliswa's house is revealed.

#### **Strip 6: Description**

##### 13. Interview (Cathy)

*Deborah: I would have said don't start building houses until we've finished with the services but then I would be dictating you know, so we've followed their process.*

*CK: How was it done?*

*I think there was pressure from the SO...I think the possibility of land invasions and then the SO said well, go ahead build your houses and then we try to, to control that to some extent, because you know, when you see an open piece of land you don't know where you are on the land.*

*We got a surveyor in...but what they do in between is not really relevant to me as long as they stay outside the road. I mean within the blocks, not within the road reserve ...and the contractor comes and he expects to have access to the road reserve and then there's a house there. And it did happen two homes were there, luckily we could move the road reserve down and some properties were then short of a meter, and then we left the services as is, because I think the contractor had already done some work and to stop expenses on the part of the contractor, we moved the road reserve. The Council normally likes the sewer to be in the middle of the road it's now off centre by half a meter or one meter we can live with that and we'll tell the Council afterwards. ...*

*Yes, they've got their specifications. They want a cross section showing the sewer in the middle of the road, water mains one meter off the curb, storm water one and a half meters off the centre of the road so that everything fits, you've got no clashes.*

*The other alternative is not to build the houses ...could they not have... maybe hung in there for another year and then built their houses? I know it's easy for me to say but because people are so sick of waiting they've waited for so long, I feel for them.*

.....Hans isn't going back to Khayaletu he is upset with the community. Because they've just gone willy-nilly and done their own things. He had a concept planned for Khayaletu, he had something planned for Khayaletu, he would have liked to have stuck to that plan, I think he's stepped back and he's saying I'm not involved any more.

CK: Have the plans been passed? How did you manage to do that?

They got stuck at the City Council you know, you site things with your plans and they say make these changes. I'd prefer a wider road, I know a refuse truck has to get in and the turning circle is a lot bigger than a motor car, they insist on corner splays. Hans didn't like 3m taken off the corner property. I understand Hans wanting as little road as possible but I also understand the emergency services having to get in there and drive something that's tricky, that may require a three point turn to get around the corner. So the City Council approved in principle but I only get the stamp approved plan and so on. It's not really delayed, I've always kept in touch with them, I mean we're not not-fly-by night operations. There are the sewers, storm water, roads and water mains. They've got their rules, our problem is with the community, is to get it back to the community to say we have to have the main wide black top (road surface – CK) to ride on of 4.5 meters. It's emergency vehicles that have to get in there.

CK: So what eventually happened with Veliswa's house, the one was that extending into the road reserve?

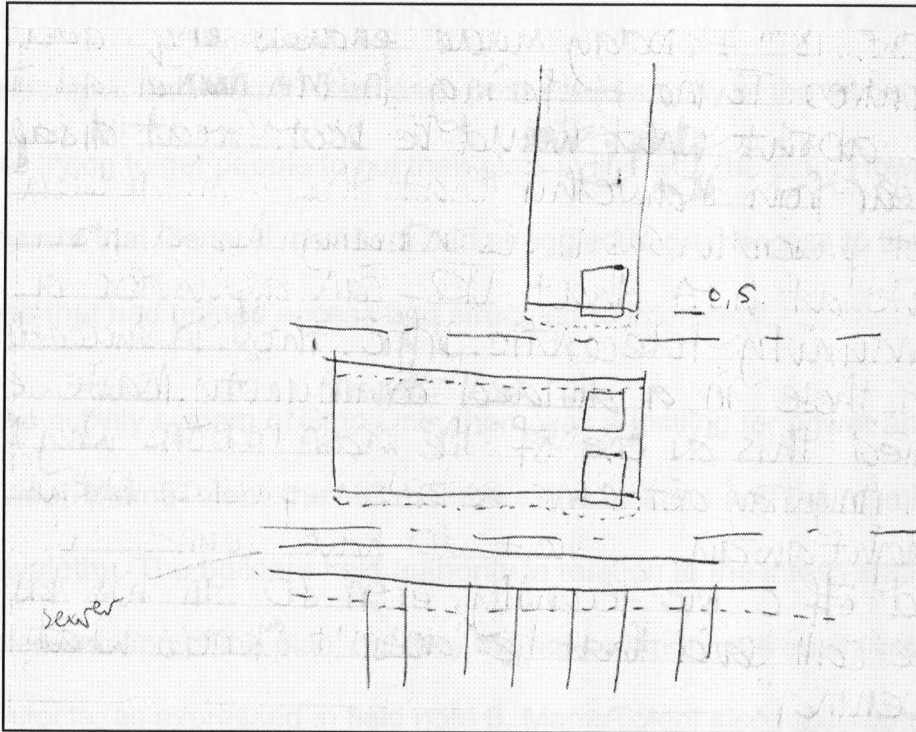
Initially we thought the woman would have to pull it down. You know the thing is that you can't go to someone who's the poorest of the poor and tell them they have to break their house down. So we shifted (unclear)...What are they going to know anyway? If it's to the detriment of another person by one meter, I mean what is one meter? They won't even notice whether they've got 21 metres or whether they've got 20 metres Do you know what we did, hey? (takes a piece of paper and starts drawing a sketch, this is copied in Figure 7.11 below) We had two - we had a block that looked that like that and another block that looked like this and then this block here had plots like that. I think the lady in question built like that and this lady built like that as well, and so what we did was we, um, (draws on the diagram) and here's the centre line (draws dashed lines) of the road and here's the centre line of the road coming down like that, so it didn't affect that road. So what we did, and there were no houses there, there was an existing house here I think (pinpoints on the drawing). So what we did was this, (draws in dotted line to show how the road reserves were moved down and the final row of plots at the bottom of the diagram get a meter shaved off.) OK, and then we did that, and then we did this, and then we did that, (draws a dotted line with each clause), so in other words, so she was now OK (uses pen to point to site marked on the sketch), that one was OK, it just moved these sizes (points with pen to block that has dotted line running through it), this didn't –

CK: Squeeze?

No, I think they actually got a bit more, these changed from 21 to 20, it didn't actually affect people, the sewer is not sitting off the centre line here (draws in sewer line), this is only half a meter, so at the end of the day I don't know if they forced her to pay compensation to these people –

CK: - I doubt it

- but that's how it worked. The services are still in the road and it didn't cost the contractor. But as the employee I have to go back and change it. When I give the drawings back to the City Council, I have to give them a built drawing, so I've got to produce, reproduce all the drawings, as it affects everything, water, sewer, I mean the layout has to be correct, I have to replot them all.



*Figure 7.11: Copy of Deborah's sketch showing how the changes were made to the plan*

This resolution was only revealed to me a few months after our absence from the site and I have no data to show how it was communicated to Veliswa. The extension however, was very prominent in Khayaletu, a material realisation and durable resolution of a complex process.

### **Mediational means and recontextualisation**

In previous chapters I have mainly focused on entextualisation and recontextualisation as processes involving written texts, this chapter has shifted the focus to visual texts – the layout plan and the house plans. The plans were designed to comply with building and town planning regulations. However, as Deborah pointed out, building had started before the planning approval was obtained but subsidies would not be granted until this took place. In the meantime members were building using bridging funds, provided by the FSO.

The process of developing the layout plan was overwhelmingly complex, and it was very difficult to extract meaningful angles from the data that I had collected. I



will start by looking at one of the recontextualisations of the plan, field note 1, in which Malibongwe was explaining to MamaFaye why Veliswa's site was wrong. Malibongwe and MamaToleni each possessed a copy of the layout plan, and they were trying to get people to cut their plots in line with the plan. However, it was apparent that General members had struggled to gain access to the plan and those that had gained access had struggled to interpret it.

In the activity system of Strip One, there was a jostling for power and authority between MamaToleni, the MC members, the builders and the members of Khaya lethu. The builders held authority in relation to the interpretation and implementation of the plan, but they did not communicate easily with the architects, as expressed in field note 5. MamaToleni also held authority in this area, and was the crucial link between the architects, builders and members. She had picked up the skills of measuring out the sites according to plan remarkably quickly and was highly adept at reading the plan and interpreting it on site. She however, had not had previous experience in this work like the builders. The other MC members tried to play this role too but found it difficult. The general members were thrown in, but guided by the "empowerment" discourse of participatory development and the "dream house" vision, were highly assertive about their wishes and needs.

Margaret arrived on site on the 05/01 during Strip One and made the change to the cutting of the plot. But despite all the builders' earlier problems they did not challenge her decision. Once that decision was made and implemented, Veliswa then acted on it and designed her extension. The meaning (the cutting of the plot) and the building of the extension made Margaret's decision more durable, less negotiable. The oversized house on the problem site continued to grow.



Margaret came into the activity system of strip 1 from another one, bridging the two. The SO was situated in a distant suburb, and most of its staff members were white, university-educated, English speakers. The builders said “*even when we call her she will come and speak language that you can’t understand*”. Malibongwe knew that there was something wrong with the plot but carried on building, telling Nonthutu that the plan was “twisted”. Nonthutu later noted that the house had an extension and verandah. He showed authority in relation to the women on site in field note 1 and wielded the plan, but he then delegated authority to Margaret, even though, as will be shown, she was wrong.

However, at a later date, Hans went to the site with his plan and was not impressed by the very material and ‘more durable’ meaning evident at and over the site boundary! Hans told MamaToleni that Veliswa’s extension and verandah must be demolished.

A few weeks later (strip 3) he stepped back a little, stating in the General meeting:

*I wasn’t there when Margaret made this suggestion and I’m sure she made the right suggestion, but the issue of crossing the boundary is not something she could recommend – I don’t know if that was a problem of arithmetic or geometry, that someone took a wrong dimension, or a problem of misunderstanding, I can’t go back – but the result now is problematic.*

At the same time, in the other activity systems, various problems were being negotiated around the plan and the building regulations. The architects were pushing hard to get the minimum size road reserve so that more land could be freed up for houses. Deborah, the engineer, was not so sure whether this was the right thing to be doing. Max, on the other hand, felt that the Councillors were being negative and not respecting the PHP, yet the architects felt that the Councillors were being quite lenient in their application of building regulations.

The meeting to which the City Councillors were invited (strip 2) seemed to be a strategy to increase pressure on Veliswa, as well as to caution the Khayaletu members who had recently been allocated sites and were proceeding to cut plots (presented in the previous trajectory)<sup>64</sup>. It was a risky strategy, visible in Max's ambivalence at the end when he expressed relief at the cloudburst and the fact that councillors would not in fact visit the building site. The strategy was elliptical, it did not draw on the usual mediational means at Khayaletu, but on the simple visual display of authority in the bodily presence of the City Councillors on site. At no stage in the meeting was Veliswa's house actually mentioned. Obviously the discussion at the meeting addressed general problems (e.g. the size of the road reserves, the positioning of the taxi rank) but from the transcript it is apparent that the councillors themselves were not clear why they had been invited to the meeting. One said:

*I understand what is going on in principle but has the scheme foundered? What things have been disapproved? I am not sure at what stage it is stuck?*

*(The SO fieldworker translates and asks the Councillor for clarity on what he said. The Councillor then says again:)*

*I don't really understand what has been disapproved, I'm not really clear about where the hiccups are and why we're here (FN 3/05/99).*

This chapter provides insight into how trajectories cross different activity systems. In particular, the two meetings, (the CCC one [strip 2] and the Khayaletu one with Hans and Max [strip 3]) illuminate the points of crossings between trajectories, as people go about their everyday business of meaning making.

The ellipsis in the CCC meeting reveals the methodological dilemma that gave rise to the questions in this thesis. If I were to use the transcript of that meeting as data

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<sup>64</sup> This field note was also presented in Chapter 6 as part of the previous trajectory:

7.2 20/04/99 Everywhere people are working on site, measuring out plots. . A member of the FSO arrived looking for someone. He said "MamaToleni I am telling you if those councillors can come here and see what you are doing they will freak out. You are not supposed to be building here. Yes, for the first twenty it was all right but this is scaring me".

MamaToleni: "I am worried that after the elections there won't be any subsidies approved".

(say in a conversational analytic approach) without wider ethnographic data, and to be more specific, if I were to attempt to use this transcript without studying the events in the meeting as part of a trajectory that had antecedent events and subsequent events (i.e. through multi-sited ethnography in particular), how would I be able to identify the nature of that ellipsis? If I cannot trace these antecedent and subsequent events, and am therefore in the dark as to the nature of the ellipsis, how can I make claims about literacy practices? What does it mean to raise this analysis above the single instance level?

### **The projecting of meanings and activity systems**

A crucial node developed when Veliswa's extension was built. It was created by means of highly durable materials (the concrete blocks and the roofing sheets) that gave form to its expression. Veliswa was making meaning, a statement', in that she was challenging the 'mantra' of 40sq metres by insisting on her extension and by not taking it down when first told to<sup>65</sup>. Up to that point, Veliswa had constructed a trajectory whose strips can be conceptualised horizontally. The visibility and durability of the extension, however, shifted the directionality of the strips into a set of different activity systems, and I suggest that this can be conceptualised as a vertical projection into a set of parallel trajectories, crossing other activity systems. There is considerable effort involved in a projection like this, one that basically crosses worlds. The house became a problem within activity systems outside and surrounding Khayaletu, *the non-local*; the architects and their planning processes, the engineers and their road sizes, the City Council and its building regulations.

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<sup>65</sup> As with Nomathamsanqa's story I would not suggest that this was a conscious design on her part, it happened almost as a series of accidents that were made at the same time as the processes were being undertaken.

This re-orientation of the direction of the trajectory was accompanied by great investments of energy and emotion, there was anger, disappointment, sadness, frustration, regret (I hope these are adequately suggested in the field notes). As in Noma's trajectory, I suggest that these investments can be seen to reify the meaning making process, adding weight to the recontextualisation that then occurred.

Veliswa acted to make meaning. The meaning she wished to express was perhaps something like: "she had lived in a backyard shack for many years, she now had access to resources which could change the conditions she lived under, she was going to build something that expressed her strength and individuality" (I do not have data to confirm this, this is my reading from the events observed). The resources drawn on in building the extension were part of the mediational means available in the activity system, in this case the very material substances of concrete blocks and roofing sheets. There was a contradiction in discursive rules – Veliswa was taking action in line with the discourses on which Khaya lethu had been founded (the rejection of RDP matchbox houses, the idea of the dream house, and the idea of people taking control of their own lives). At the same time her action was contesting more recent discourses that were emerging around needing to work together for the good of the whole and not taking actions that would threaten the development. The division of labour at the moment of the node enabled her emergent meaning i.e. the builders did not challenge Margaret's decision, even though they had strongly challenged earlier mistakes made by Khaya lethu members.

The contradictions in the activity system enabled the design and production of Veliswa's extension, and (rather like Nomathamsanqa's story writing process and unlike MamaSolani's ordering of building materials) this was emergent rather than

regularised. I argue that the extension became reified (evidenced in the debate and emotions surrounding it). The reification then indexed the broader discourses circulating between these levels of different activity systems, just as Nomathamsanqa's did.

The recontextualisation of the problem (the oversized house) into the engineer's activity system produced another node, when Deborah re-drew the overall layout plan to accommodate the house. She did this in order that the City Council would approve the plans, and to accommodate Veliswa's oversized house. It involved a drawing process whereby the whole block of houses (which were not yet built) adjacent to Veliswa's block was shifted and made marginally smaller, so that the road reserve could still be the acceptable width, and the sewers would be (acceptably) close to the middle of the road.

Trajectory, strip and node	Mode	Media (and technologies of production)	Artifact (material form/genre)	Resources (individual and group-based, historically and culturally conditioned)
Chapter Six. Recording activeness, strip A, Busi and Nomi write names	linguistic, writing	pen and paper	list of two names	code-breaking pragmatic semantic
Chapter Seven. Oversized house, strip 1, building extension	spatial, building	concrete blocks, roofing sheets etc.	extension to the house	not clear
Chapter Seven. Oversized house, strip 6.	visual, drawing	computer, engineers' pens, drawing board, sheets of paper, reproductions	overall layout plan	not clear

*Figure 7.12: Comparison of mediational means selected from different nodes in different chapters*

Some points need to be made about this table. Firstly, it must be seen as a tentative argument for comparing mediational means. A full exploration of these means and a comparison of them, is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is

important to point out, however, that each of the columns contains elements that make up what I am arguing for as mediational means – modes, media and technologies, artifacts and resources. In the case of literacy I make a strong argument for these elements. In the case of the visual or spatial modes the elements identified are suggestive, and although resources like the pragmatic and semantic may be useful analogies, I have no warrant for claiming that they are analogous.

Secondly, this analysis verges on a discussion around the value of the term ‘affordances’ (Oliver, 2005; Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988; McGrenere and Ho, 2000; Kress, 2003). While valuable in itself, it is beyond the scope of this thesis<sup>66</sup>.

Thirdly, the role of artifacts is more complex than would appear from the table, and again, a full exploration of this is not possible in this thesis. The problem is that the artifact is produced in the activity that makes up the strip, it is not simply available waiting there to be “drawn on”. At the same time, the knowledge of and experience of a ‘generic’ artifact (perhaps, a genre) – a story, a list, a plan, an extension, is available within the repertoire of possible resources at that place at that time, drawing on other mediational resources suggested in the table<sup>67</sup>. The activity and the social relations within which it takes place are what will give it specific form.

However, **emergence** is an important theme. Noma’s grasping of the opportunity presented by a written genre (the “story”); Veliswa’s grasping of the opportunity presented by “an extension to a house”, are significant moments. The participatory development process, as well as the emerging government policy of the People’s Housing Process combined to create an opportunity whereby Veliswa accessed

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<sup>66</sup> It should suffice to say that the way the concept of mediational means is used in this thesis could enable further research on affordances, but does not depend on the concept.

<sup>67</sup> Bowker and Star (1999:298) put it clearly: “(Objects) are used in the service of an action and mediate it in some way. Something actually becomes an object only in the context of action and of use; it then becomes as well something that has force to mediate subsequent action”.

resources beyond the usual circuits available to the “poorest of the poor”. This was similar to the way in which Nomathamsanqa accessed the story-writing process, which had not been seen previously as providing mediational means for meaning making. Blommaert’s point (2005) about having “access to contextual spaces” is not so much about physical space, but about the mediational means to project meanings into such spaces. In places like Khayaletu, material resources are few and they are deeply embedded in and stretched across complex social networks, often drawing on intangible interpersonal resources like trust, as we have seen in this chapter and the previous ones. This was similar to the complex mediations taking place around letter-writing amongst migrant workers in South Africa, reported in Kell (2000).

### **A multiplicity of different (hostile) worlds in a (divided) city?**

Towards the beginning of this chapter I indicated that I would be assessing Bremner’s claim about the apartheid city that “we are more likely to move relentlessly towards a multiplicity of worlds in a divided city” (1999:243).

The data presented in this chapter and the tracing of the threads between the trajectories suggests that perhaps the divisions are not so great, that perhaps there are tentative, halting, moment by moment processes of crossing those worlds. The process is reminiscent of Linell’s words quoted in Chapter Two when talking about recontextualisation: “What is being exchanged is not only words and discourses, but the worlds that make discourses” (Linell, 1998:147).

This was particularly evident in the following extracts from the interview with Deborah:

*Initially we thought the woman (Veliswa) would have to pull it down. You know the thing is that you can’t go to someone who’s the poorest of the poor and tell them they have to break their house down.*

*So I went to meetings when they were necessary, looking at the social side of the community, but I've sort of grown into the social side (meaning social development rather than only technical – CK). But you have to stand back now and then. I just can't get too deeply involved. And I help them as well I mean, personally I have gone, in my own capacity I have gone to them with my own time, my own petrol, because I know I can't claim the time back from here. But here's a social aspect that the company has to fulfil. So I go and take them things, so I make sure that whatever is in my private life I make sure that they get things, so having worked with them now, it's made me think of life a bit differently now. If I was just coming into the office and doing jobs I'd probably never have to think this. I'll try my best now.*

The SO staff as well as the architects all had their own multiple trajectories, and yet they negotiated the intersections of these worlds tactically, and with care, although the frustrations were immense. It is the members of Khayaalethu who implacably carried on with their struggles to survive, as had Nomathamsanqa, even though at times they felt “as if we are alligators eating our own tails”.

## **Conclusion**

The strips that I have studied in the earlier trajectories have mostly contained events that have occurred sequentially, that is one after the other, moment by moment. In this chapter, however, I have moved up to a higher scale of analysis, and have shown how trajectories can occur simultaneously, and that they intersect in various places and moments, like the two meetings presented here. A single trajectory can be traced along a horizontal axis, strip by strip. But multiple trajectories can be linked across vertical axes. I suggest that these links are the “coexistences at single moments” which define the “multiplicity” that Law and Mol (2002) attempt to describe. At the same time projecting across such levels requires investments that may be either semiotic, perhaps financial, perhaps emotional, amongst many others. This notion of projection captures something, at this stage very tentative, about the structuring of relations of inequality in this very unequal world we live in.



## Chapter Eight. Conclusion: A language of description for the study of the movement of meanings across contexts

*...if we wander inside IBM, if we follow the chains of command of the Red Army, if we inquire in the corridors of the Ministry of Education, if we study the process of selling and buying bars of soap, we would never leave the local level...Yet there is an Ariadne's thread that would allow us to pass with continuity from the local to the global, from the human to the nonhuman. It is the thread of networks of practices and instruments, of documents and translations (Latour, 1993:121, quoted in Brandt and Clinton 2002:346).*

*Every human action, all human activity takes place on one or more characteristic timescales. A heartbeat, a breath, a step, a spoken word takes but one moment; a stroll, a conversation, extends over many such moments; and an education or a relationship may be a lifetime project. The great cathedrals of Europe were built over many human lifetimes, and the languages and discourse patterns of our communities have developed over still longer times. And yet a conversation consists of many momentary utterances; a relationship may be built of many strolls and conversations together; a building or a social institution is erected by the sum of many individual actions in a community. (Lemke, 2000: 273)*

### Introduction

Methods of representation, objects, technologies and of course, texts, are all part of the mediational means drawn on by actors (ourselves) as they (we) engage in the multiplicity of meaning making processes making up their (our) lives, the lives of those around them (us). I have taken the compiling of a list or a story; the writing of numbers on arms or on a record sheet; the re-drawing of a plan and I have tried to show how such processes do "leave the local". Brandt and Clinton, quoting Latour again, make the call that "We need... more complicated analytical frames – a "continual progression of inquiry" at sites of reading, writing and print that can follow the threads of networks both into and out of local context and other contexts" (2002:345). In this thesis I have tried to lay out some steps towards this

end, but at the same time I have come to quite different conclusions from those of Brandt and Clinton. I will spell these out in a later section.

“Walking is a mode of covering space that gives no overview” (de Certeau, 1984).

I have not tried to give an overview of what happened at Khayaletu, of what I learnt through ethnography and an intervention about living on the edge and struggling to make a better life. That seemed like an impossibility, despite the years I spent working there and the reams of data that I collected. But I have tried to walk again through four of the processes that I observed, tracing the stories of these developments on the ground, as they shifted from place to place, moment by moment. In this attempt I have tried to grapple with questions that I held about how to think about literacy, and to extend the tools that the NLS has offered us.

In Chapter Three I explained how I drew on the work of Burawoy (1998) to inform my methodological choices. Firstly, “extending from the observer to the participant” (ibid:16) encouraged me to affirm what I had at times called a ‘partisan stance’ in the ethnographic approach in the field. I did not seek to observe, to stand back from the ‘naturally occurring’ stream of events on and beyond the site. I knew that what I was doing was having some impact (however small or big); that I needed to be aware of that and to study it as well.

Secondly, Burawoy’s idea about “extending observations over time and space” (ibid:17) related closely to the concept of recontextualisation which I had been working with in different ways and in different sites for a number of years. A central element in Bernstein’s analysis of the formation of pedagogic discourse - the concept brings to light the value of shifting from the study of things in themselves to the study of the relations between them:

...it is the insulation between the categories of discourse which maintains the principles of their social division of labour. In other words it is silence

which carries the message of power; it is the full stop between one category of discourse and another; it is the dislocation in the potential flow of discourse which is crucial to the specialisation of any category (1996:20).

Bernstein has put this evocatively, but the passage is so metaphorical it ends up as a crude description. Linguistic anthropologists and socio-linguists will show that there is never really insulation, there is overlapping, intertextuality, hybridity. And there is no ideal potential flow of discourse to be dislocated. But there is something in his enigmatic idea and this is what brought me back to the diagram I drew to capture the movement between the development institutions in Site 5, shown in Figure 1.1. I didn't have analytical tools to capture that movement over space and time between the development institutions. I didn't have a language for describing it, yet I knew that somehow folded within it lay an answer to some of the dilemmas I felt I had not managed to address in my Masters thesis.

Thirdly, "extending from process to force" (Burawoy, 1998:19) has two sides to it. On the one hand, Blommaert's pinpointing (2001c and 2005) of the weaknesses of both CDA and CA on questions of power reminded me of the questions I had had about my Masters' research. In that research I identified discourses and then made claims about literacy practices as embedded in those discourses, on the basis of the observations of literacy events and general ethnographic data. I believe now that the process of identification of discourses should have been the result of the research, not the starting point.

On the other hand, underlying my work at Khayaletu was a curiosity about the rhetoric of participatory development, and what it was that enabled or constrained participation. In my work as an activist in adult literacy in the early 1980s, (as referred to in footnotes in earlier chapters) our literacy teaching (based on the Freirean approach) was inseparable from the events of the time and aimed primarily (and unashamedly) at increasing the involvement of the adult learners we

worked with in the struggles for democracy. In my Masters research at exactly the time of the first South Africa democratic election, I had noted that Winnie Tsotso's participation and leadership was highly contextualised, and was slowly diminishing at that point in South Africa's history (Kell, 1996; 2003). Feldman (undated, but probably 1996:3) in commenting on that research (amongst other research) argued that:

Mainstream literacy and numeracy (as conceptualised by the new democratic government and many NGOs – CK) function as symbolic capital and as a fetishised substance-of-power, as much as they operate on a pragmatic terrain of communication, reasoning and recording.... As a substance-of-power mainstream literacy paradigms are starting to impose unfortunate outcomes on the everyday democratisation process. Thus for instance the Social Uses of Literacy research demonstrates how local community activists who occupied leadership positions in the resistance to apartheid have become increasingly marginalised via their participation in local legislative and governmental councils. These fora wield the literacies of formalism and procedure as a new technology of stratification between those who may have been enculturated in residual formalist governmental procedures and those whose main experience has been in front-line community-based, rapid response activism. One could argue that this dynamic validates the rapid acquisition of mainstream literacy paradigms, but one could also ask what are the social, cultural and political costs in marginalizing, delegitimising and excluding other competencies that reflect so much of the everyday life experience of underclass communities and the history of grassroots democratisation in South Africa? This is not a romantic claim for in this context will capacity building occur at the expense of the jettisoning of in-situ capacities (i.e. skills and tools) that make an unacknowledged contribution to the social fabric?

The work of the SO and HASSOC was an attempt to take back some of the ground that was lost in the 1990s and to rebuild social movements and harness people's energies through ensuring that such "in-situ capacities" were not jettisoned. I was therefore keen to explore whether (in the late 1990s and at the turn of the century) and how the concepts of participation and empowerment stood up to scrutiny, and how literacy would be implicated. These questions also lay at the basis of my first research questions about the pedagogical implications of an ideological model of literacy.

Finally, in “extending theory” (Burawoy, 1998:20), I wished to make a contribution to extending the tools available in the New Literacy Studies and to addressing aspects of the challenges I have outlined.

### Challenges facing the NLS

In Chapter Two I outlined the emergence and development of the New Literacy Studies. I identified what I saw as challenges facing the NLS. I called these challenges the 4Ms:

- materiality
- multiple literacies or multiliteracies or literacy practices
- multimodality
- models

In Chapter Three I identified four interlocking problems facing me in working with the current tools available in the NLS. These problems flowed loosely from the 4Ms. I addressed these to varying degrees as I worked through the data in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, but I will briefly summarise the problems again.

1. *The need to move beyond single instance events to an understanding of flows as sequences of events.*

This problem was linked to the first challenge to the NLS: Materiality.

Brandt and Clinton (2002) had argued that an understanding of literacy **beyond the local** meant that literacy needed to be seen as having agency in itself, they made a plea for it to be seen as “a transcontextualising agent”. It was at this time that I was starting to develop the concept of recontextualisation and later realising that it may provide a possible answer to my disagreement with their argument (Kell, 2000, 2001; 2002; 2003 amongst others). Street later replied to them arguing that “literacy has both the potential to disembed, to separate interaction from the particularities of locales, and yet at the same time is always instantiated, its

potential realised, through local practices” (2003:2829). This statement brings together both time and space analytically. It is a part of the answer to Brandt and Clinton’s argument. But, in my view, there are still missing parts; firstly, the term literacy in itself, does not specify whether the focus is on the nature of entextualisation processes or of the resources drawn on, or on the text- artifacts thus produced; secondly, it does not yet give us a specific way of understanding how this instantiation takes place. I will return to the implications of this below.

This first key problem is related to time, to action (at different scales) unfolding over time (“time’s arrow”). It relates to the concept of time in two ways. On the one plane (the emic) it asks: Empirically, how do we trace events as they express the movement of meaning across time, and what role is literacy playing in that movement? On the other plane (the etic) it asks: How do we move beyond discourse analysis at the level of single instances? How do we make it, as Blommaert argues, “involve higher-level situatedness”? Then, how do we theorise literacy at that higher level of situatedness? What helps us to translate between the two planes? I will argue in the next section that the development of a language of description can help us to translate between these two planes.

## 2. *The need to de-limit the boundaries of context in order to specify what inferences can be made about literacy practices*

This problem was linked to the second challenge to the NLS: Multiple literacies/literacy practices/multiliteracies.

My second key problem has more of a spatial dimension. The opposite of an ‘arrow’; it may be conceptualised as a circle (or even Engeström’s Activity systems’ triangle). This problem is linked to the question of domains, of how the uses of literacy take shape within what Blommaert calls “contextual spaces” or Street and Kress call “cultural spaces”. Many writers in the NLS claim that at a

higher level of description, these domain-specific uses become widespread enough and commonly enough practised to be called 'literacies' (academic literacies, religious literacies and so on). However, with the terms of the first key problem already in place, the focus has to be on how specifically literacy shifts across these spaces, and what literacy is, when the term is used in this way. 'Literacy practices' has been the main conceptual tool available for such study. My question has been - how do we know what the boundaries of context are if we are to make justified claims about literacy practices, or even 'literacies' for that matter?

### 3. The need to shift from a linguistic frame of reference to multi-modality and semiotics as the frame of reference

This problem was linked to the third challenge to the NLS: Multimodality. Multimodality was only just starting to be spoken of as a field of study, when I started writing this thesis (2001). I outlined a question for myself at that stage: "how was I limiting myself by focusing only on literacy"? Back in 1999 I had learnt from Nomathamsanqa's story that a switch from the verbal linguistic mode to the written mode corresponding with a switch across contexts was a telling case (Mitchell, 1984), and that the physical 'occupations' of buildings or spaces in MamaSolani's trajectory and also evident in the Site 5 data that I had analysed were too<sup>68</sup>. I knew therefore that I needed to find a framework that would allow me to replace literacy with other modalities as and when necessary. I knew that it was also important to look at mixed modes of communication and the almost instantaneous switching which writers like Kress are now starting to look at, but that that would demand different frameworks. As I continued work on this thesis, research in the field of multimodality burgeoned and clearer frameworks are now being articulated (Kress, 2003; Jewitt and Kress, 2004). However, extracting modes and media of communication for study from the social practices within

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<sup>68</sup> The Site 5 data from which the initial diagram was drawn (Figure 1.1) was also analysed as part of this thesis, but was not included here,

which they are given shape can lead to a kind of “mode determinism” (Street, 2003a; Kell, 2004), although work on the concept of affordances aims to address this problem (this issue is not dealt with directly in this thesis but see Oliver, 2005; Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988; McGrenere and Ho, 2000; Kress, 2003). Street and Kress (2006) have recently outlined a view of how the fields of study of multimodality and the NLS can complement each other. In identifying and addressing this key problem in addition to the previous two, I have attempted to ‘work in’ and ‘work out’ aspects of this complementary space.

#### **4. The need to find warrants for claims about literacy, social structure and power**

Up to this point I have not explicitly linked this key problem to the fourth challenge to the NLS: ‘models’, nor have I addressed it in any detail. I have suggested that tentative answers to this key problem will emerge from the language of description that is generated to address the first three key problems. I will first present the language of description and then return to discuss this fourth key problem.

### **The language of description**

The development of a method for studying meaning making trajectories led me to the development of a language of description. The elements in the language of description address the first three key problems. Together, they provide an answer to one of the research questions guiding this thesis, which was “What units of analysis are necessary and sufficient for the study of the movement of meanings across contexts?”

The key purpose for me in focusing on a language of description involved finding conceptual terms and relations that could be applied in further cases of research, beyond the specificities of what I observed in Site 5 and in Khayaletu. This is



what Bernstein (1996: 135 – 141) claims is important in the idea of a language of description. The “internal language of description” (which I have portrayed as the “etic”) is “the syntax whereby a conceptual language is created. The external language of description refers to the syntax whereby the internal language can describe something other than itself” – this is what is seen as the emic. The crucial point that Bernstein makes is that a concept should not be known or recognised by its apparent outcomes, it should be known by “how it comes to be” not by “what it does”. This idea seemed to me to apply to the way in which I had worked with discourse in my Masters thesis, as I had described earlier. It seemed to me that I had arrived at the identification of discourses *a priori*, and then used them to locate literacy practices. But by the same token I felt that I had also arrived at the identification of literacy practices *a priori*, in that I did not have a means of translating from the literacy events that I was seeing to the practices that I claimed.

According to Bernstein:

...if an internal language is a condition for constructing invisibles, external languages are the means of making those invisibles, visible... A language of description constructs what is to count as an empirical referent, how such referents relate to each other to produce a specific text, and translate those referential relations into theoretical objects (p136).

My understanding of Bernstein’s argument is that there needs to be a ‘model’.

Without modelling what members are doing in a specific culture the researcher “is marooned in the specific contexts and their enactment, fixed in their spatial and temporal frames” (p137). I therefore sought to find a set of conceptual relations which were derived from the analysis of the data, but which had generality.

The elements in the language of description (LoD) are presented in the following table. Each key problem gives rise to a conceptual shift and the shift is addressed through the derivation of the elements from an analysis of the data.

Key problem	Conceptual shift	Element in LoD
1. Single instance data (events)	To meaning making as flow across time, defined in terms of:	Sequences of events
		Nodes
		Strips
		Trajectories
2. Boundaries of context and need to make inferences about literacy practices	To activity systems, defined by:	Actors and purposes Participant frameworks mediated by: 1.rules 2.division of labour and:
3. Linguistic frame of reference	To multimodality, conceptualised through:	3.mediational means including: -modes -media -artifacts -technologies -resources

*Figure 8.1: Framework showing how the language of description is derived from the key problems*

The following is a generic and abstracted description of the relations between the elements necessary and sufficient for the study of meaning making as it crosses time and space:

Meaning making is conceptualised as flowing across time and space, and undertaken by individuals and groups acting together. Events are observable social interactions in which meanings are made. Events can be grouped into sequences with regard to the meaning making process, and these sequences extend over time and space. Certain criteria help to define the beginnings and ends of sequences (notably the moments when meaning making shifts participant frameworks, which may correspond with a movement across space, time or both), and sequences are known as strips. Within a strip, nodes may occur. Nodes contribute to the direction of a strip and this directionality contributes to the grouping of strips into what is defined as a trajectory. Nodes may or may not enable the strip to continue in the direction in which it has been going, or reconfigure the trajectory in a new direction.

A trajectory enables the conceptualisation of meaning making crossing space and time. Strips are conceptualised as firstly, taking place within participant frameworks, and secondly, as mediated action within activity systems. Mediational means, rules and the division of labour mediate the action. Mediational means, drawn on by actors, can include communicative modes and associated media, the artifacts drawn on or produced and the technologies used in the production. In addition, a repertoire of resources for the design and production of meaning can be drawn on. Such resources in relation to the linguistic mode (and possibly able to be extended to other modes) include code-breaking, pragmatic, semantic and meta-discursive forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge are both embodied in individuals and distributed across groups.

### Temporal and spatial scales and levels

Lemke (quoted above) paints a broad picture of the processes that make up life as we know it. I ask: How do we 'imagine' these events and processes together? What tools do we have for doing so? How do we then model them on the etic plane?

I have chosen to orientate the heuristic of activity systems to the level of the strip, and strips can be comprised of between one and many events. The timescales of the strips in the various trajectories that I have studied differ from between (at minimum) one half hour through to around five months. Spatial scales drawn on in this study have largely been those of the local area, of about 500 metres in diameter, although stretching at times 25 kilometers across the city to the architects' and engineers' offices, the SO office and the building supply shops; at times hinted at as processes constructed at a national level (as in the building supply shops and the national building regulations).

I could have chosen to focus on more micro-level processes, on the one hand, like the detailed interactions between Noma and her neighbours and visitors as people came to read her story, or on the precise interactions that took place at Build-O-Rama as MamaSolani purchased her building materials. A detailed analysis of the neighbourhood reading process could have been limited to about a circle of a few metres in diameter, similarly, an analysis of the interactions at Build-O-Rama. The timescales of the strips in this case could have been minutes or perhaps even seconds. The spatial scales could have been a couple of metres of face-to-face interaction. However, the level at which I have pitched the data and the analysis is comparable at its smallest scale to much work undertaken in the fields of interactional sociolinguistics. I have 'zoomed in' at that level of analysis.

On the other hand I could have focused on more macro-level processes, like the operations of Khayaletu as a whole in relation to HASSOC and the implementation of the People's Housing Process, in which case the timescales would have been months and years. At the bigger spatial scale of HASSOC as a whole and the PHP this may have necessitated studying processes taking place across the whole country.

The language of description developed here, therefore, is intended to be applicable at these different scales, to be able to be used to 'zoom in' on the micro-level processes or to 'zoom out' on the macro-level ones.

With the shift to meaning making crossing activity systems the question of meaning determines the scale of analysis. I happened to be conducting ethnographic research in Khayaletu, a project centred on a small piece of land in the outskirts of Cape Town. As I tried to understand the locating of literacy practices at this scale I realised that I had to engage with the complex processes and systems that crossed through this space and time, but needed to de-limit the study of these in order to be able to make justified claims and remain true to an ethnographic "epistemology" (Blommaert, 2001a).

In conceptualising these different scales it is important to note that the way in which the heuristic of 'activity system' is applied, is an etic description. Unlike the use of the concept of communities of practice I am not implying that there is any emic affiliation between members in the participant framework within the activity system beyond the meaning that is being established in the particular trajectory under study. The term 'system' implies functional, even spatial forms of organisation. This is not necessarily the best term available to discuss the work I have done, but because activity theory is well-suited to the overall work of this thesis, I did not want to distance myself from the work of Engestrom, who has

been so influential in conceptualising activity systems. My decision, (following Goodwin, 1990) to conceptualise the relation between the actor, the other participants and the object as “a participant framework”, which is then mediated within the activity system, is new. I believe this may facilitate compatibility between interactional sociolinguistics and activity theory, allowing for a closer look at the mediational means (beyond language) drawn on in the types of situations that are studied by interactional sociolinguists, and perhaps enabling such work to extend beyond the analysis of face-to-face, spoken data.

### **Research questions**

As explained in Chapter One the first research question was: “What are the pedagogical implications of an ideological model of literacy?” The sub-question to this was: “Can the informal promotion of literacy take place within everyday contexts? If so, how?” These questions were raised in relation to the funded project at Khayaletu, but the funded project was so fraught, so inconclusive and ultimately so ‘political’ that I did not feel able to write about it as a more traditional ethnography. What the funded project did bequeath to this research was an approach to ethnography that involved intervention and engagement. Evidence of this can be seen in Chapters Four and Five, although it may also be perceived in the way Thutu and I conducted ourselves on site viewed through the field notes. Around five years after withdrawing from the site and working through the experiences, there are many things I can now say in answer to these first research questions, but these are beyond the scope of this thesis. In the meantime I needed to turn to questions which took me away from pedagogy and ‘promotion’.

These were the questions which had remained outstanding from the research I did in 1993, but which I only formulated much later.

- How does the view of literacy as situated social practice account for the movement of meanings across contexts?
- What units of analysis are necessary and sufficient for the study of the movement of meanings across contexts?
- What does the study of shifts of meaning making across contexts contribute to understandings of literacy, in particular the notion of literacy practices?
- How are the local and the non-local conceptualised as meaning making traverses contexts?

I now summarise the work undertaken in this thesis in answering the research questions. The four research questions do not flow directly from the four key problems, they are higher level questions which are addressed by the language of description. Question Three is the main research question guiding this thesis.

### **Question One**

*Question One asks “how does the view of literacy as situated social practice account for the movement of meanings across contexts?”*

Street has always argued that the concept of literacy practices enables such an account to be made. In Chapter Two an important challenge to this view as articulated by Brandt and Clinton (2002) was outlined.

In reflecting on my Master’s research I noted that finer research tools were needed to address the gap between the study of events and the making of claims about practices. Drawing on concepts from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, work was presented that had been done on contextualisation cues and indexicality and the role of these concepts in mediating communication over space and time at different scales. I indicated, however, that (until Blommaert’s recent work (2005), and that of Bloome et al [2005]) most of this research had focused on spoken language rather than written. I will return to these concepts below to reassess their value in addressing the above research question.

A selection of literature on the concept of context was reviewed, as well as the few studies which have addressed themselves directly to the concepts of

entextualisation and recontextualisation. I have noted that when “literacy” is studied, the concepts of entextualisation and the text-artifacts thus produced are often conflated, and this related to debates about the distinction between text and discourse.

In summary, I argue that there are gaps in the tools for addressing the question and new tools are perhaps only in the process of development; but that the language of description developed in this thesis suggests one way in which the problem can be addressed. This way has enabled me to make claims about practices as I will outline below. It is only a partial way, and it may be better suited to the analysis of temporal sequences of meaning making, of the types that occur in organisational, development or workplace contexts, rather than, for example, the building of friendships, or families.

## **Question Two**

*Question Two asks “what units of analysis are necessary and sufficient for the study of the movement of meanings across contexts?”*

The units of analysis are meaning making trajectories, undertaken within shifting participant frameworks and mediated within different activity systems. These units can be studied by applying the elements of the language of description as presented above in Figure 8.1.

The language of description enables translation between the emic (the observable events) and the inferences that need to be made if general conclusions are to be drawn (if researchers are not to be, as Bernstein quoted above claims, “marooned in specific contexts”). The terms of the language of description are derived from the close analysis of the ethnographic data, but extend and refine (Burawoy, 1998) the key theoretical premises of the New Literacy Studies.

The articulation of the need for a language of description was an important aim of this thesis and the development of the language of description was the result. The thesis has therefore been primarily a methodological contribution. However, in developing the language of description, its application to sets of data drawn from the same ethnographic field site enables certain claims to be made about that site, which I will address below, while also addressing theoretically the third research question.

### **Question Three**

*Question Three asks “what does the study of shifts of meaning making across contexts contribute to understandings of literacy, in particular the notion of literacy practices?”*

The concepts of literacy events and literacy practices lay the foundations for an ideological model of literacy, as opposed to an autonomous one (Street, 1984; 1994). An analysis of literacy practices (drawing on observable literacy events) enables researchers to make claims about the role of literacy (and the ways in which it is viewed) in relation to issues of power, social structure and the dynamics of change. But if such claims are to be made, principled descriptions need to be generated for the study of the relation between events and practices. I critiqued my own earlier research for lacking a rigorous approach to generating such principled descriptions. In addition, I have made an argument about the need to specifically study flows of meaning making in contemporary society in relation to arguments about how to conceptualise literacy in the global/local binary.

Throughout the ethnographic work for this thesis and much of the analysis, I have tended to bracket the concepts of literacy practices. However, I have studied events, many of which can be seen as literacy events. I have bracketed the concept of literacy practices, because I felt that I had gone into my previous research site (Site 5) looking for literacy practices and I had found them. In



Khayaalethu, certainly there were countless events involving literacy as can be seen in the data. However, I found it very difficult to make inferences about literacy practices. The trajectories I studied were not specifically chosen because they were representative of literacy events and practices. In addition, the shift towards activity theory meant that I focused on activities rather than practices. However, having worked through the recontextualisation processes in each trajectory I feel I can now make some claims about literacy practices. These then reveal issues about power, literacy and social structure in the site at that time, which I discuss further below. They also reveal issues to do with social theory in general.

I argue that the concept of literacy practices already privileges literacy within the study of literacy. By situating the study of literacy in relation to the process of meaning making and privileging the meanings which flow, are carried, facilitated, obstructed or blocked by its use, I have shown the importance of viewing literacy as a mediational means and resource which is drawn on in this meaning making. It is one amongst many such means. In the contexts that I have been studying, literacy is not necessarily the dominant means for meaning making. Its uses have not necessarily been naturalised, in fact sometimes they are highly reified (I will explore this point further below). It is drawn on as a resource in the exercise of power through action. But it is not a free-flowing resource, it is utterly contingent on context. I have limited the study of this contingency by situating it within activity theory, which requires that mediational means are viewed from within the activity system, in relation to the actor's activity under study, the participant framework in the strip, and conditioned by the rules and division of labour which give historical specificity to the activity system. However, the mediational means are not isomorphic with the social practices within which they are deployed. There are always degrees of choice or constraint, and these degrees are a result of the

factors which make up the activity systems, coming into existence at the moments when meaning making actions are undertaken.

In the previous chapters I have outlined difficulties with inferring patterning and regularity about the uses of literacy from the data, and have therefore not provided descriptions of literacy practices at Khayaletu or beyond. In the following section I will present some claims about literacy and processes of reification or naturalisation, in a broader context that defies classification as traditional, modern, or late modern. The language of description has enabled this difficulty of classification to become visible, and cast light on broader questions of social theory, which will be touched on below.

In the meantime, I will revisit Luke and Freebody's (1999:no page numbers) statement (presented in Chapter Two) that literacy capabilities involve firstly "the ***breadth*** of an individual's or a community's repertoire of literate practices; the ***depth and degree of control*** exercised by an individual or community in any given literacy activity; and ***the extent of hybridity, novelty and redesign*** at work". In a context like South Africa, characterised by deep and entrenched inequality, especially with regard to access to schooling, these three dimensions are especially relevant. Grappling with questions of inequality can easily slide into the making of autonomous claims about literacy. I argue that Luke and Freebody's dimensions cannot be viewed as absolute or universal, or that those that have been denied such access cannot be seen as unable to communicate 'fully'. Instead I hope to have shown that in conditions of 'disrupted modernity' people 'compensate' through the creative deployment of other communicative modes and that the emergence/hybridity/innovation dimension takes on greater significance.

I hope that the data in the previous chapters has provided some evidence for this argument, while not for one moment downplaying the extent of disadvantage and deprivation people have experienced.

Much recent theorising in the social sciences has focused on the relation between the local and the global. As indicated in earlier chapters this has extended to the asking of questions about the New Literacy Studies and the possibility that NLS romanticises the 'local'. Implicit in the use of the term global is the sense that the global is 'out there' impacting on the local, as if power comes from 'outside' somehow. Brand and Clinton's argument (2002:344) states that:

....social practices are not necessarily the shapers of literacy's meaning; indeed they may be the weary shock absorbers of its impositions.

The language of description developed in this thesis shows that social practices are the shapers of literacy's meaning, in that actors draw on literacy as one amongst many mediational means to design, produce and project their meanings. But these practices may as well be the weary shock absorbers of impositions resulting from the unequal distribution of such resources and the power relations whereby they are or are not deployed.

Brandt and Clinton further argue that:

...what happens in events may provide evidence of how powerfully literacy as a technology can insinuate itself into social relations anywhere.

...we need to grant the technologies of literacy certain undeniable capacities, particularly a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events.

These are strong claims for granting agency to literacy, which I believe cannot be sustained. The authors claim that these capacities stem from the legibility and durability of literacy and its materiality. I hope that the trajectories studied have shown that literacy itself can't travel, but when used as a mode of representation in

a particular medium it can enable 'meaning' to travel, and depending on the conditions of its recontextualisation (and I will enlarge on this argument below with regard to a point about the extent of reification or naturalisation) that meaning may or may not be legible (or recognised and realised) in the context in which it arrives. In Kell (2006) I presented a metaphorical argument on this point: A message written in English and cast out to sea in a bottle can travel, it can stay intact, it will have durability, visibility, but if it is washed up on the shores of remote Kamchatka, it may certainly not be legible in that particular recontextualisation. On the other hand, while it may be very legible, a word written on the sand at the beach has a very limited durability and certainly cannot travel, its form and its meaning are exhausted in the immediacy of the practice.

I suggest that my argument in this thesis, despite relativising the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices in relation to social practices of meaning making, strengthens the New Literacy Studies because it has at its core the idea that mediational means can only be conceptualised as animated in social practice.

However, I agree that literacy does "insinuate itself into social relations everywhere", if one wants to use such a loaded term. In my initial discussions with the SO staff at Khayaletu, Max stated that he was not interested in promoting literacy, but rather in "de-literacising" the house-building process (Max's term, field notes, 23/03/98) and this was evidenced in the very early activities on site at the time where people were "modelling" house sizes by using huge bales of brightly coloured cloth to construct the walls of houses. In my field notes I then recorded:

<i>Interesting that despite Max's insistence on not moving to text, the next step was to appoint a team which would do precisely that. (FN 28/03/98)</i>
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This contradiction acts like a metaphor for what I observed throughout my time at Khayaletu. Literacy was everywhere, as I have shown at the most micro-level

possible (Busi and Nomi's writing of the note, for example; Matiti's list of building materials). I believe that an engagement with it is inescapable in our world.

#### **Question Four**

*Question Four asks "how are the local and the non-local conceptualised as meaning making traverses contexts?"*

The formulation of this question implies something of an answer, that rather than a local/global binary, the approach here suggests a local/non-local pair. The value of ethnography is that it clarifies the issue of point of view and ensures that this is always made explicit in research and writing. Ethnography is the attempt to understand and communicate "insider perspectives". So I argue that we cannot ever definitively say what is global but that we can perhaps say what is "not-local" when we understand and make explicit the point of view of "local". It may then be possible to collect data starting from 'local' and build up more and more 'non-locals', this may take us far away from where we started but it will not necessarily result in a global. This brings us back to Street's reworking of the idea of re-embedding, but hopefully making a stronger claim for the ideological model of literacy against the autonomous model (Street, 1984). Literacy can never be autonomous, it can only be activated within each recontextualisation, and depending on vantage point each recontextualisation may be one step further removed from the original 'local' or 'locale' that was studied. In this way Appadurai's "vectors" and "flows" can be appreciated not as abstract concepts but as situated chains of human activity (Appadurai, 2000:5). This approach implies what Engestrom called "a radical localism" (1999:36).

## **Making invisibles visible**

I will now venture into a tentative account of what the language of description has enabled me to make visible in Khayaalethu; tentative, because I have focused in this thesis in making methodological claims rather than claims about literacy in development in South Africa at the turn of the Century. I will first, however, explore two key concepts which have arisen in each chapter, reification and naturalisation. These are not elements in the language of description, a discussion of these concepts shows that they are the result of applying the language of description, the process whereby invisibles are made visible.

It is necessary at this point to return briefly to material covered in Chapter Three, in particular the work of Wenger (1998), and his concept of the relation between participation and what he called reification. I explored the term reification in the different trajectories and noted that (as explained in Chapter Three) Wenger gives the term reification a positive gloss, claiming that reification is an important and necessary phenomenon. On the other hand, Bowker and Star (1999) link the term participation to the term naturalisation, which I have also touched on in the trajectories. I need to now address the question of what the difference is between the two terms reification and naturalisation, in relation to the concept of participation.

While working in Khayaalethu, I constantly mulled over Wenger's duality of "participation" and "reification" in my mind as I took part in the types of activities I have described in the trajectories. Sometimes, and against my own wishes, I felt that there was "too much participation and not enough reification" (in Wenger's terms). In these trajectories and in other meaning-making processes (which are not described in this thesis) there was endless, recursive discussion, meeting after meeting, at which agreement was not reached, or verbal decisions and

agreements were reversed, overturned or overlooked, decisions appeared to be ephemeral. Khaya lethu members themselves often complained of this, of too many meetings, of lack of agreements being reached, of lack of clarity in processes. They often used the idiom “we are alligators chasing our own tails”. So when I claimed (to myself only and I wished to be proved wrong) that there was “too much participation and not enough reification” I was sensing that there were few agreed means for ‘fixing’ decisions, simply staying with them (even temporarily) and using them as a basis for further decisions.

The concept of reification in this usage was viewed through Wenger’s lens, with its positive gloss, and I was aware that I was thinking about the term loosely. I was also, however, influenced by what I now see as a modernist teleology implied in ledema’s work (1999; 2001), reminiscent of evolutionary thinking in Great Divide perspectives on literacy, and sometimes evident in the work of writers such as Kress (2001; 2003). This involves the idea that resemiotisation and recontextualisation imply the design and production of meaning making along a scale of greater durability and lesser negotiability, as discussed in the final sections of Chapter Seven. In the process of analysing the data presented here, I arrive at a different conclusion about the usage of the term reification and the relation between participation and reification.

Participation takes place in relation to action on different scales. In order to avoid the positive value-laden connotations that are often invoked with the use of the term, I apply it at the level of the language of description, by choosing the concept of participant framework. Participant frameworks both enable the actor to take on a role for the action required, as well as provide the social relations in which such action has meaning. The action, within the participant framework, is mediated in and by the activity system. In Wenger’s view, mediation occurs in processes of

participation, and in his view this would lead to reification, but reification would become part of further forms of participation. Context can be conceptualised in these terms.

Bowker and Star (1999) as indicated previously, use the terms membership and naturalisation, while couching their argument very much within the “communities of practice” frame. They talk however, about these as “two sets of relationships”:

....between people and membership on the one hand; and objects and naturalisation on the other hand. In any given instance, both membership and naturalisation are relations along a trajectory (1999:300).

Both Wenger, and Bowker and Star, use metaphors of how these pairs are ‘woven together’.

Where my research differs is in the prioritising of meaning making, the role of actors and mediation in their meaning making processes across space and time. With this in place, the theory of activity systems enables both the study of meaning making and the limiting of the boundaries of such study. Participation is the preferred term for my purposes (more so than membership) but in the more neutral sense of participant frameworks (drawing from interactional sociolinguistics). However, in my view an analytical step is needed in between participation and reification; and between membership and naturalisation. Before something can be either reified or naturalised, even if literally only momentarily, it needs to be entextualised (or perhaps, in the contexts I have studied which are development contexts), a more useful term might be “codified” [see Farrell, 2000]). For the moment, I use the term entextualisation here, to include in the broader sense, uses which I have tried to avoid throughout this thesis, for example, concrete and roofing sheets becoming an extension to a house; or bodily gestures and the taking up of space becoming an “occupation”, or even a land “invasion”.



It is at that point that research can reveal whether naturalisation or reification is occurring, and what the implications of this might be. The approach is therefore in line with what Bernstein (1996:137) argues for, that research should reveal how something “comes to be” rather than “what it does”. By situating entextualisation moments in the ongoing flow over time and space, I have drawn attention to what I observed as high levels of emotion and personal investments, often expressed through what can be seen as metadiscursive markers, for example, the demand from the architects to demolish Veliswa’s extension was met by the utterance: “our slogan was Matshoba Road” indexing the earlier discourse of struggle and “dream houses” (Strip 3; Chapter Seven). Such moments occurred at the “joins” between activity systems, but they also indexed broader and intense, discursive struggles.

In the previous chapters I have proposed ways of viewing the “joins” that were created between activity systems, usually in entextualisation and recontextualisation processes. I argue that a “join” like Noma’s story became **reified**, and this reification meant that she herself became reified. In MamaSolani’s case, the texts functioned within the participant frameworks to **naturalise** the process of ordering materials. In the recording activeness trajectory, there was again significant reification of all the little texts or noted absences of texts. Finally in the oversized house trajectory, I argue that the extension itself was reified. But in the resolution eventually reached through the efforts of the architects and the engineer, however, it was naturalised.

A helpful perspective on this is provided in Bowker and Star’s definition of naturalisation:

...naturalisation means stripping away the contingencies of an object’s creation and its situated nature. A naturalised object has lost its anthropological strangeness. It is in that narrow sense de-situated – members have forgotten the local nature of the object’s meaning or the actions that go into maintaining and recreating its meaning....The more

naturalised an object becomes the more unquestioning the relationship of the community to it: the more invisible the contingent and historical circumstances of its birth (1999:299).

Reversing each term used by these authors, I believe, shows the opposite of naturalisation to be reification. I hope that the data provided and its analysis illustrates why I argue that Noma's story was reified rather than naturalised – it had not had the “contingencies of (its) creation” or its “situated nature” “stripped away”; it had far from “lost its anthropological strangeness” (in fact, in my vivid memories of how the neighbours came to read it, watching Noma, observing her read, being shown the cracks in the roof – I was reminded of anthropologists in the field). And I could apply the same analysis to the texts in the recording activeness trajectory and the oversized house trajectory.

But I cannot apply this analysis to the ordering of building materials trajectory. MamaSolani's very difficulties (her own difficulties with reading and writing; her anxiety about speaking English or Afrikaans; her lack of experience and knowledge about what the process would involve) and the mediators that she drew on, illustrate the naturalisation even more clearly. The texts that formed the “joins” did not index ‘conflicted’ processes and intense discursive struggles.

The trajectory could be ‘imagined’, the communication could be predicted and the texts therefore acted as both pre-supposing and entailing indexicals. As they were recontextualised they “presupposed” the conditions from which they had emerged, and they “entailed” what everyone anticipated (Wortham, in Wortham and Rymes, 2003:16), i.e. Build-O-Rama staff recognised that MamaSolani came from HASSOC, that the type of house she was building had been agreed upon, that she had a site to which materials would be delivered and so on. This became “presupposed”. On the other hand the materials that were delivered to the site had been “entailed” by the earlier entextualisation processes and the text-artifacts.

In MamaSolani's case the naturalisation of the "joins" formed through the entextualisation processes and the text artefacts facilitated easy recognition and realisation of the indexicals and what they presupposed or entailed. In the recording activeness trajectory however, the reification of the joins did not.

On the other hand I have shown that most of the "joins" in the other trajectories were reified. The entextualisation processes and the text artefacts were not at all standardised. Noma's story was unique. Veliswa's extension was the result of a 'mistake'. Busi and Nomi's little note was 'only just' recognised by Nomhle; Nomhle's record-keeping was not recognised by HASSOC officials and so on. I drew on the concept of **emergence** in relation to these trajectories, and I will now explore this further. Wortham (in Wortham and Rymes, 2003:17) outlines the way in which this concept has been developed to describe:

...how subsequent utterances can transform the functions of prior ones. Participants response to an utterance can change its meaning. Without knowing what responses followed an utterance, participants and analysts often cannot know whether an utterance was appropriate or what identity the speaker was adopting. An utterance has particular interactional functions, ultimately because of the effect it **comes** to have in the interaction. Indexical cues in an utterance establish its functions only as subsequent utterances indicate that those cues have been taken in a certain way. On this account, in order to interpret or react to an utterance, participants and analysts must attend not only to the moment of utterance, but also to some later moment when subsequent context has helped the meaning of the utterance to solidify. At the moment of utterance the relevant context has often not yet emerged (Wortham's emphasis).

Wortham's choice of terms in the emphasised "**comes to have**" is important, and signals something about temporality. He is describing processes that are almost instantaneous, ones in which meaning and metadiscourse circulate tightly through turns in talk. This work is all very relevant to the contexts of spoken interactions, but what happens when the interactions are spread out over time and space? This point is at the heart of this thesis.

The mode of speech (unless amplified through particular media of distribution) necessitates a compacting of space and time, while the mode of writing does not. The recontextualisation that occurs as meaning crosses space and time means that there is a far greater degree of tenuousness in the relation between the indexicals and what they actually index. This is where my argument for the concept of the change of “strip”, as involving changes of space, time or participant framework, gains salience. An actor can project a meaning across space and time; if the recontextualisation of this meaning occurs within the same participant framework the chances of the meaning being recognised and realised within the participant framework are much higher, than those which do not cross space but are recontextualised into a different participant framework<sup>69</sup>. So if they are, for example, projected vertically, very different power relations may come into play in the new participant frameworks into which the meaning making process is being projected.

Both naturalised and reified joins can be seen as boundary objects which when reaching a degree of systematisation can become boundary infrastructures, drawing on Bowker and Star (1999: 287). These authors claim that:

...the institutionalisation of categorical work across multiple communities of practice, over time, produces the structures of our lives, from clothing to houses. The parts that are sunk into the built environment are called here boundary infrastructures – objects that cross larger levels of scale than boundary objects.

I argue that these infrastructures need not be the parts that are sunk into the built environment, this view privileges the material at the expense of the discursive. My view is that comparable infrastructures can be created through standardised paperwork structures.

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<sup>69</sup> They will always cross time, because one of the media of linguistic communication is time.

The question that needs to be asked is: Should there have been (or in principle “should there be?”) some standardisation in the joins that made up the trajectories other than MamaSolani’s? Bowker and Star ask the valuable question: Does standardisation involve symbolic violence in the kinds of categorisations that it implies and the resultant inclusions and exclusions? In my previous work I have argued that it does. The outcomes based approaches to adult literacy teaching that I have studied (Kell, 2000a; 2000b; 2003) standardises experience and pedagogy in such a way that implicit biases work to include some versions of the social order and exclude others<sup>70</sup>. However, standardisation worked to MamaSolani’s advantage. Despite the fact that she herself did not read or write anything, the participant frameworks across the different activity systems acted as a kind of distributive system in which reading and writing were mediated to MamaSolani’s advantage. The resources that she brought involved adequate knowledge of the process, (as well as, of course, the cheque from the bank) enabling her to project the meanings and their associated actions into each further context as necessary.

The provisional answer to Bowker and Star’s question in this context, then, is that symbolic violence is not a necessary outcome of standardisation. However, I believe that the other trajectories characterised by reification generally demonstrate that a lack of standardisation created more space for the play of surplus power and the exercise of symbolic violence. The exclusions occurring in these processes were significant, at the level of Khayaletu. Once the processes moved beyond Khayaletu, into the HASSOC office, into the architects’ and

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<sup>70</sup> This is what Feldman alludes to in the quote at the beginning of this chapter.

engineers' offices, this symbolic violence was sometimes mitigated<sup>71</sup>, as could be seen in Deborah's accommodation of the oversized house.

The one normative claim that I will therefore make then in relation to participatory development in Khayaletu is to argue that the SO's attempts to work with "communities" in South Africa "get it right" in terms of bringing worlds together and therefore the necessary crossings; but "get it wrong" in terms of not addressing the "politics of codification" at the local level (Farrell, 2000). The contradiction in the SO's work at that time was that staff believed that, through participation, people would solve their problems. The implication of the approach at Khayaletu, however, was that at the local level people remained powerless on the whole to project their meanings, unless they became reified and therefore accompanied by huge investments of conflicting emotions, struggles, and risks. What I hope the work here has shown is that participation needs to be linked with "codification" and, to some extent "naturalisation", while remaining ever mindful of the ways in which such processes can entail symbolic violence or reification. This entails a need to focus on the detail of how communication occurs and how it is mediated through semiotic resources. Max's argument that he wished to "de-literacise" the process, and that mediational means which are not already part of the community's repertoire should not be introduced, is unrealistic and leaves the members open to gate-keeping and lack of transparency.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned in previous chapters the research of Iedema, Mehan and Blommaert was conducted in highly industrialised countries and bureaucratised societies.

Sequential recontextualisations in these cases followed well-worn paths like rivers

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<sup>71</sup> This issue is echoed on the emic plane. Throughout Phases Two and Three of my work at Khayaletu, I picked up great anxiety amongst the SO staff about power relations at the grassroots levels, that they had become very hierarchical, that there were allegations of corruption, that the 'spirit' of 'social movements' was being lost.

that have carved out their patterns on the sub-strata. The stages along these paths did represent more durable and less negotiable forms of meaning making, for example, even as they perhaps naturalised symbolic violence. The kinds of spectacular, emergent and contingent processes characterising Noma's trajectory, or the recording activeness one, were not evident. Although in Noma's case the trajectory did lead to a more durable form of meaning making (i.e. her house was rebuilt), in many other cases the opposite occurred. I have touched on the implications of this for participatory development work. What are the implications of this for social theory?

Previous sections of this chapter present the "visibles" revealed through the application of the language of description. I hope to have presented a picture of a development process that defies the tradition/modernity distinction, or the postmodernity/modernity one. The crossings described in each trajectory traverse physical locations and organisational structures that defy such categorisations. In my work on site, I watched sheep being slaughtered, their skins hung out to dry in the shed through which I regularly walked to the building site; I heard about how MamaSolani walked the two and a half kilometres to Khayaletu with her window frame in a wheelbarrow; claims of witchcraft were frequently made, especially with regard to the unexplained death of one of the MC members (not Nomathamsanqa)<sup>72</sup>. Payment for the builders at one stage was stolen during an armed hold-up, which some members claimed was an inside job. After Noma died there was great anxiety that her children would lose access to the house and that they would be abused. The General at one stage had to discipline members from pirating their own electricity to the neighbouring shanty-town, the cables for this lay across the roads and the children played over them. At one stage in the process,

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<sup>72</sup> At a meeting of HASSOC in an adjacent area, I sat in a meeting addressed by the 'First Lady' of an African country, while next to me two chickens (cruelly bound together with a piece of wire) flapped around and one laid an egg on the floor next to me.

and over about a nine month period, about one hundred people were living on site already, with numerous others visiting everyday, and there was literally not one toilet. At a later stage people put toilets into their houses but the pipes had no outlet, because the pump station had not yet been built. So people started using the toilets and there was a build up of sewerage in the pipes. In the meantime the “digger” (a large machine driven by a person) brought in to dig the underground space for the pump station fell into the hole, into which the pipes were supposed to release the sewerage. This was a hugely expensive mistake, the costs for which would eventually be taken off the individual members’ subsidy money.

On the other hand, Khayaletu members interacted (mediated through the FSO) with computerised financial systems which were allocating subsidy money to tens of thousands of people nationally. Many of the staff members working for the SO, the FSO and the architects were not South African, but were visiting from other countries and frequently travelled overseas on work trips. On one day I travelled from Khayaletu, (where there had been allegations of witchcraft around the death of a member) to the city where I met with the engineer in her office in a sleek City Centre skyscraper, and I passed through spaces filled with quiet engineers working on computers. These were not easy contrasts to negotiate.

The concepts of reversibility and irreversibility have been implied in much of the analytical work in this thesis. The studies by Blommaert, Iedema and Mehan have given expression to the concept of irreversibility. But I have also drawn attention to differences between these three studies and identified what I called a modernist teleology in Iedema’s study. According to this teleology, in Khayaletu, the architects’ design should have led to the production of a house, for example. But it didn’t. So in Khayaletu we had:

- A plan became a house (sometimes it did).



- No plan became a house (often houses were built without plans, the builders were simply asked to copy and adapt other houses, even though this was very difficult).
- A house became a plan (Veliswa's house led to the re-drawing of the overall plan and the re-submission to the Council).
- A house became no plan (In between the building of Veliswa's extension and the resolution the plan was 'in abeyance').
- No plan (nearly) became no house (Veliswa was asked to remove her extension, because it threatened the plan).

This description acts as a kind of metaphor to address the difficulties of assuming irreversibility in Khayaletu. The coherence accompanying the "uniform administrative" procedures of Blommaert, Iedema or Mehan, was not at all apparent in Khayaletu, nor was it apparent in my earlier work in Site 5. What has been uncovered in this research resonates with Rampton's claim that:

System and coherence lose their compelling force when their status as culturally specific values becomes clearer and when analysis moves into the gap between relatively stable groupings, where regularities and conventions are much less certain (Rampton, 1998:2).

The language of description developed in this thesis has led to the study of gaps, the gaps created when meaning-making shifts across space and time. The first diagram from my Site 5 research intuitively posed the question of these gaps. This research has found some tools for addressing them, as well as for answering questions about literacy in social practice.

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